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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

October 21, 1891.

No. 678.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK

Ten Cents a Copy. Vol. LIII.
\$5.00 a Year.



ANOTHER AND ANOTHER CAME FORWARD AND CAST HIS VOTE THAT WAS TO TELL
THE FATE OF THE HAPLESS GIRL.

OR,

THE BALEFUL BEAUTY OF BRIMSTONE BAR.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS,
"HERCULES GOLDSBUR," "SUNSHINE SAM,"
"MONK MOREL," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MAJOR HOLLYHOCK AND PARD.

IN the early dawn of a summer morning an ordinary looking man emerged from one of the well-built cabins of Brimstone Bar, the lively capital of the Sangre de Christo Mountains in Colorado, and passed down the ample street to the one hotel of the mining-town.

It was not too early for the thirsty citizens of the bar to be taking their sips and nips in the bar-room, but the man did not enter the place, but continued his journey to a staircase by which he reached the second story of the Black Bowie and rapped gently on a door of one of the upper rooms.

He was invited to "come in!" and, opening

the door, he found himself face to face with a man with a full beard, who greeted:

"Ah, thus early, Joseph! Sit down. I will be through in a moment," and he went back to the writing before him.

The caller dropped upon the only unoccupied chair in the cramped room and waited until the man at the table was ready for business.

Soon the writing was finished, and then turning to his caller with a smile he asked:

"Any news, Joseph?"

"Not much," was the reply. "I saw her again last night."

"The girl?—Lucy Lynx?"

Joe Jingle the caller, nodded.

"And, of course after what I've told you, you looked well at her?"

"I couldn't help it, you know. She is pretty, and besides—"

"Besides what, Joseph?"

"She looks a little like another person in this camp. I saw that after a brief study of her face, and you see when I made that discovery I thought of the strange story I heard Captain Satin-Slipper tell the other day. You heard it, too?"

"Yes—the story of the man who left the States long ago and turned up a gold nabob some where in California; how his daughter, who had been left at home, hunted him up and was recognized by a scar on her arm, though she looked somewhat like her father? It was an interesting story and lost none of its snap by being told by Captain Satin-Slipper."

"That's what," smiled Joe, looking at the man at the table. "By the way, isn't he a fine flower to be blooming here?"

"The captain?"

"Yes; he is slicker than Colonel Samson, though not as rich by a hundred thousand or so."

"Samson, the Silver King!" mused the other aloud. "Joseph, they have a queer lot of citizens in Brimstone."

"A deuced queer lot," was the retort. "I don't know how they came to congregate here. For instance, there's Captain Satin-Slipper—somehow or other we always name him first—and Samson, and Lucy Lynx, and yes, by Jove! there's Lady Tiger, too."

"I was wondering if you intended to leave her out of the catalogue, Joe, old boy," laughed the other, who, when he came to Brimstone Bar for the first time, had registered as "Hiram Hollyhock from Homespun." "It will never do to leave Lady Tiger out of the list of Brimstone's distinguished citizens. We might as well leave Samson out as her."

"That's what," again put in Jingle. "I thought I would drop in this morning to see if you had anything for me to do."

"How's the mine?"

"It's the same old story; nothing for us, while everything that Samson touches turns to money."

"It seems to. Meantime Captain Satin-Slipper works the Yellowbird, and though it doesn't yield him one-tenth as much as a single shaft of the Grinning Tiger, he is happy."

"A fellow ought to be, with the prospect he has before him. They say he has actually captured the Queen of Sheba."

At this a smile overspread Major Hollyhock's face and he looked at his companion some time before he spoke again.

"Joseph, would you be in clover if you had the same prospect ahead?" he asked.

"I—I don't know, major," was the reply. "She has the face of a seraph—that is, I think she has, though my acquaintance with such beings is rather limited—and her figger is grace itself. But, then, I don't like her; I can't say just why. I don't envy Captain Satin-Slipper his conquest. She may be all right—an angel even here at Brimstone Bar; but I don't quite think so."

Major Hollyhock, with the quiet smile still lurking at his mouth, looked away for a moment and then slowly turned his head to his visitor.

"Women are strange beings, Joseph," he remarked. "We will have to let this thing go on without interfering in the play."

"Heavens, you had no notion of interfering with Captain Satin-Slipper's courtship, had you?"

"Not with that. But, Joseph, are you ready to ride at any time?"

"You know I am always ready to do anything you mark out for me."

"I won't send you off this morning, but the time is near at hand when you must seek the saddle and take the Red Trail back."

"To Cinnabar?"

"To Cinnabar."

There was no reply for a moment; the two men sat facing one another, though in Joe Jingle's eye there was a look of wonder.

In another minute he had risen and stood before his master with his sombrero hanging alongside his ample leg.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"That is all."

Joe bowed and withdrew and Major Hollyhock fell back and looked at the door.

Joe Jingle went down to the bar-room where

he proceeded to "wet his whistle" with some of the fiery stuff which was placed before him by the man on duty.

The sun had come up and was kissing the peaks of the gold mountains that rose above the camp.

All at once the doorway was darkened by a queer-looking creature, who stopped the moment he saw Joe drinking at the bar.

"Come up an' have something," called out Joe, glass in hand. "I have no race prejudices and would as soon drink with you, No Tung, as with one o' my own sort."

The short, wiry figure of a young Celestial glided forward, and poking his head above the top of the counter, made a sign which the barkeeper understood, for he dived one hand beneath the board and fished up a peculiar looking bottle which the Chinaman seized with delight.

"The best in the land can't make him talk, eh, Bill?" said Joe, addressing the barkeeper. "I wonder where Captain Satin-Slipper ran across the yaller chap?"

"He wouldn't tell if you asked him," was the reply and then both men fell to looking at the Celestial, who proceeded to pour out a few thimblefuls of the hot liquid, which he swallowed without so much as waiting to touch glasses with Joe.

"That's the queerest man in Brimstone," continued Jingle, as the Chinaman bowed and drew one of his yellow hands across his mouth. "I wouldn't like to have him against me—he's so much like a cat with his soft step and pussy-like purr. But I guess he gets along very well with Captain Satin-Slipper."

"If he didn't we'd hear something."

"Of course," and throwing some money on the counter Joe turned and walked toward the door, just as there crossed the porch and bounded into the room a man whose eyes were all excitement, shouting:

"He's dead and no mistake," looking first at Joe and then at the man behind the bar. "From the way it looks ter me it would take a Philadelphia detective ter unravel the mystery. It's the first real one we've ever had in Brimstone an' it's a dandy one, too. Who'd have thought that Colonel Samson would have been the first victim?"

With a low cry Joe at once had the man by the arm.

"What's that about Colonel Samson?" he demanded.

"He's dead—murdered!"

"No!"

"Fact! I've just come from the house and no one has touched him since the killer went away."

And breaking from Joe's grip the man went to the bar where he poured out a nerve-steadier and downed it at a gulp.

Joe seemed to stand spell-bound, with his eyes staring at the messenger.

"How was he killed?" he ventured at last.

"I don't know; I wasn't thar when it was done."

"Are you sure there's no mistake?"

"That Colonel Samson isn't dead, but is alive an' kickin'! Yes, I am sure o' that. I've seen a few dead men in my time an' I know when the corpse is a stiff, every time."

In a moment Joe was going up-stairs again, and re-entering the apartment, found Hiram Hollyhock still at the table.

"We've got something out o' the old rut at last in Brimstone. Colonel Samson has been murdered!" he cried as he entered.

The pen fell from Major Hollyhock's hand and he recoiled as with horror.

"Murdered?" he echoed. "Impossible!"

"Must be so. Cyclone Kit just came from the house. He's down in the bar-room now."

"Said Samson was murdered, did he?"

"Yes, and that it was all a mystery. Did not know any thing about it, only that Samson was dead as a door nail, killed by some one right in the heart of Brimstone."

Major Hollyhock seemed thunder-struck, and Joe watched him, wondering, perhaps, why the killing of the Silver King had so affected him.

"I guess I'll send you off now, Joseph, to Cinnabar," said the major sedately.

"Write out the message, boss. I'm ready."

Major Hollyhock turned to the table and began to write.

Joe went to the window and looked out. All at once he beheld several men come down the street, gesticulating wildly, heading for the bar-room.

Saying that he would return in a moment, Joe at once went out.

He was not gone more than a minute when he returned.

"They say they know who killed him!" he exclaimed. "It was the girl, Lucy Lynx."

Major Hollyhock's face lost color and he gasped like a man suddenly deprived of air.

CHAPTER II.

A BEAUTIFUL NECK IN DANGER.

"KILLED by Lucy Lynx!" he exclaimed. "Who says so, Joseph?"

"That's what the three men are saying who are down at the bar. It is nearly a clear case against the girl."

"But Cyclone Kit just a few moments ago said it was a mystery."

"But these men have been there since he came away."

"Have they arrested the girl?"

"Not yet."

"Joseph, now you *must* go to Cinnabar. Don't let grass grow under your feet."

"I won't, boss!"

Joe took the letter and was gone, leaving Major Hollyhock at the board with clinched hands and a face still wanting color.

"Killed, and by Lucy?" he muttered. "Who says so, I wonder? I don't see why she should kill him, unless—"

He checked himself and crossed the room to the door.

"I'll see for myself. Joe will do his part, and I told him I would send for him if ever I needed his help. I guess I need it now, for I don't believe the girl did it."

He at once descended to the bar, and found that more toughs of Brimstone had come in. They were, for the most part, dark-looking men, with determined visages, and revolvers at their hips. Like the lily of the fields, they toiled not, neither did they spin; but ruled the camp with a rod of iron, and were said to belong to a secret tribunal, for of late, several persons, obnoxious to a part of the town, had been hanged by men wearing black masks.

The Black Tribunal of Brimstone Bar was a dread institution, for it was not known who belonged to it, nor who was its moving spirit. It carried out the decree of the secret chamber, and no one was the wiser after seeing its victims dangling in the air, for the noose was the usual instrument of death.

Major Hollyhock was looked at by the men in the bar-room, and one, with whom he was best acquainted, nodded when he entered.

"The sex must not shield her," declared some one in the crowd.

"The guilty, no matter of what sex, must not escape," was the echo.

Then, it was true. Colonel Samson had been murdered.

Ten minutes later the major stood for the first time under the roof of Samson, the Silver King.

Everywhere he met dark faces which wore determined looks, and here and there heard curses which boded ill for the person suspected of the crime of murder.

He made his way to a little room which was fitted up as plainly as a room could be. It was not in keeping with the wealth of the owner of the house, nor was it like the other rooms of the house. They were furnished luxuriously, but here was an apartment not one whit better than the dingy chamber of the poorest tough in Brimstone.

It was this room that held the body of the dead.

Reclining in a chair, with his long arms hanging down over the sides of it, was Colonel Samson.

There was a look of repose on the face—no traces of pain, and one not knowing a crime had been committed would have thought him sleeping after a night of work over the books which contained the story of his wealth.

But Samson, the Silver King of Brimstone Bar, was dead, and, what is more, he had been murdered.

Major Hollyhock quietly moved up until he stood face to face with the dead man. A spasm of sudden pain was seen to cross his face; then he leaned toward the body in the chair, while he used his ears, for the men of the camp were talking in whispers on every side.

"She hasn't confessed yet, has she?" asked one.

"No, captain; but, then, she won't say yes or no, an' you kin form an idea of what that means."

At the word "captain," Major Hollyhock looked up.

Captain Satin-Slipper was one of the foremost citizens of Brimstone Bar. He was still young, had not passed thirty-five, and was a lady's man if ever there was one in the Sangre de Cristo Range. His complexion was good, his eyes bright and soft when he addressed the fair sex, and he had the shapeliest and softest hands in camp. In short, he was a bit of humanity in velvet, a handsome "ne'er do weel" who, like the men around him, did no work that tried his constitution.

Nobody knew from whence he came. He dropped down into the Bar one day and from the first became a favorite, though there were some who did not like his sleek, fawning ways, nor take kindly to the Celestial—the mute Chinaman—who, as his constant companion, was said to sleep at his door with one eye open.

No Tung and Captain Satin-Slipper were inseparables, and when Major Hollyhock beheld the Adonis of Brimstone Bar at his elbow, he allowed his glance to roam a little further and saw the Chinaman leaning against the wall, with his almond orbs fastened on the dead man in the chair.

The major wondered what Captain Satin-

Slipper thought of the charge against the young girl—Lucy Lynx. He tried to fathom the look that he observed in the captain's eyes, but could not, and turned away for another glance at the dead.

"That's the Tiger," suddenly announced a voice near by, and Major Hollyhock looked up again.

"That's the beautiful mystery of the camp, that's the velvet Jezebel of Brimstone Bar," he said, under his breath, and then began to study the magnificent looking woman who had slipped into the house and stood near the door with her eyes also fixed on the occupant of the chair.

Lady Tiger did not seem one whit disturbed, but eyed the crowd and the victim till some one suggested that the room be cleared, and Colonel Samson be examined by a committee to see how he had been killed.

Captain Satin-Slipper said he approved of this proceeding. It might throw light upon the case, and, then, he did not want to see the innocent suffer for the work of the guilty. This was thought to be in favor of the girl supposed by many to have killed the Silver King, and when it was decided to examine the body, the room was cleared, and a little man called Doctor Dick was ordered to conduct the investigation.

There was something interesting in the eagerness with which the doctor of Brimstone Bar undertook this commission. He selected two assistants, and went to work behind closed doors. The crowd went out and waited, some in the adjoining saloons and others out of sight.

Major Hollyhock felt his arm touched, and turning, found Captain Satin-Slipper at his side.

"Busy, eh?" asked the captain.

"No. We have to wait on Doctor Dick."

"And then not know much more than we do now," smiled the captain. "If you will come with me to my house I will talk, and I guess you are a little interested in this sudden crime."

The major had never entertained a very flattering opinion of the Adonis of Brimstone Bar. His civil-like movements and the presence of the silent Celestial had turned him against the man, and to his disgust, when they entered the captain's house and retired to a room for talk, he passed No Tung at the door.

"What do you think?" asked Satin-Slipper, as he dropped into a chair.

"Do you mean about the charge against the girl?"

"Yes."

"I have heard none of the evidence, but without hearing it, I am ready to say that I don't believe she would commit a crime like that."

"You don't, eh?" and Satin-Slipper leaned forward and smiled. "Of course, being a friend of hers, I am glad to hear that from your lips; but, it's black, almighty black."

"What, against the girl?" cried Hollyhock.

"Even against her."

"What is it?"

"She was in the house last night."

"In Colonel Samson's house?"

Captain Satin-Slipper nodded.

"Something legitimate may have taken her there."

"Something legitimate? That is good, major. Murder may be considered legitimate under some circumstances."

"But I didn't mean that."

"Of course not. I think I understand you. Well, the girl herself admits that she went to the house, and after midnight at that."

"After midnight?"

Major Hollyhock found himself repeating the words almost unconsciously.

"Don't you know that that and her silence are against her?" asked the captain.

There was no answer.

"But, that isn't all," Satin Slipper went on. "The girl was foolish. She should have left her dagger-sheath at home."

"What, have they that in evidence against her?"

"They have."

"Who holds the sheath?"

"Lady Tiger."

The major started.

"What, is this to be woman against woman?" he exclaimed. "Is Lady Tiger to turn against Lucy Lynx and send her to the Black Tribunal?"

"She says she would befriend the girl; she found the dagger-sheath in front of the house, and, if she had not been seen to pick it up, I have her word it would never have seen the light of day while in her possession. Lucy is in the toils. She stands in the shadow of the noose—"

"But, why should she kill Colonel Samson?"

"Ay," cried Captain Satin-Slipper, grinning in his usual way, "there's the accursed rub. You can't fathom this creature called Woman. This girl is barely twenty; yet she stains her hands with blood and the blood of a man who never could look at her without biting his lips, who always followed her with a look of pity. I can't understand it."

At this moment No Tung, the Celestial, came in. He bent over Captain Satin-Slipper until their faces almost touched, and the major

thought he saw No Tung's lips move. But, it could not be, for the Chinaman was a mute, or considered so by all.

At any rate, Captain Satin-Slipper's hand was seen to shut and remain in that condition.

"It's blacker than ever against the girl," said he. "I have just learned that Colonel Samson was killed with a dagger that just fits the sheath."

Major Hollyhock seemed to lose every bit of color.

"Can't we save her?" he cried. "Can't we get this girl out of the toils? You don't know why she killed him—admitting that she did. She may have had great provocation; women sometimes have, you know; and when she talks—"

"But she says she will never tell what she knows," broke in Satin-Slipper.

"She must talk or die," was the reply. "Where is Lucy?"

"At her own shanty."

"Under arrest?"

"In a manner. She knows the talk against her; she has heard of the finding of the dagger, and, beyond the admission that she went to Colonel Samson's house after midnight, she has sealed her lips. No Tung has just told me—"

"Pardon me, I thought your Chinaman was a mute?"

"So he is, but whenever he wants to tell me anything he talks with his fingers. I understand the light taps he makes on my arms, and if you had watched his hand while he was in the room you would have seen the fingers move. No Tung is a queer fellow and we are brothers, no matter what sort of blood he has in his veins. Are you going to see Lucy Lynx?"

Major Hollyhock had risen and stood before Captain Satin-Slipper.

"I may see her," he said; "but not just now."

"Well, I'm sorry; but the girl is doomed. The Black Tribunal will try her like a common criminal. If Lady Tiger had not been seen to pick up the dagger's sheath all would have been well."

"In the name of God, why did she pick it up then?" said the major to himself, and the next moment he stood in the street again.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE ON THE RACK.

THE sun mounting higher at last dissipated all the shadows that lingered in a little room where a young girl with disheveled tresses sat on a low stool and with clasped hands seemed to watch the play of sunbeams at her feet.

She was quite alone and though she could have opened the door and walked out, she was still a prisoner, and the eye of the Black Tribunal of Brimstone Bar was fixed upon her.

Lucy Lynx, a girl with a wail's history, a living mystery of the mountain camp, had before her a future dark indeed unless she should open her mouth and tell what she knew. She had confessed nothing, neither had she denied, and here is where the danger lay.

Colonel Samson, careless with his wealth, always ready to furnish food for the gaming sharks of Brimstone Bar, had become a general favorite, and the toughs feared that his riches would descend to some one who would hold them with a miser's grip and send them (the toughs) to the mines to dig for more.

The single occupant of the cabin had her dinner prepared by a woman known as Maverick Moll, who came in like a ghost and, without more than once addressing the silent creature, had spread the cloth and gone off, leaving the meal on the table.

It was past noon, yet the girl had not tasted food. The men who flitted past the shanty had stopped long enough to look in at the little window and see her sitting on the stool, eyes on the floor and white hands clasped.

To them guilt was written on every line of her face. She had played murderess, this young creature with soft babyish hands and calm blue eyes; she had taken the life of the nabob of Brimstone Bar and the reason for the crime was locked up in her bosom, and her lips had refused to tell one single line of it.

Lucy Lynx—the name seemed to fit her now as it had never fitted her before—sat silent, until evening shadows began to fall. Then she arose and began to partake of the food.

There stood at the window a man who watched her with a singular curiosity. He was not like some others in the camp. He was young and handsome and his garments told of mountain travel, for they were dusty, and there were horse-hairs along his leggings.

"I don't believe it," he exclaimed, when he had watched the girl some time. "I wish I had been here sooner. I would have given anything if I had come in last night. She kill Colonel Samson? It is false!"

At this moment, as if unconsciously swayed or influenced, Lucy looked toward the window, and the bread she was raising to her mouth dropped upon the table.

She stared at the face at the window, and, with eyes that seemed to start from her head, was clutching the table in her fright, for fright it was.

In a moment, however, she rushed toward the

window and met the look that regarded her from the other side of the glass.

"Go! For Heaven's sake leave me alone!" she cried. "Why did you come back? I was hoping something had happened to you in the mountains—that— But no! don't take me as I say. My head is on fire. Would to God I had never seen the light of day!"

A sudden whiteness overspread her face and she reeled from the window.

"But, Lucy, you are innocent. You did not commit this crime. They have lied on you—they are trying to get you into the toils because you—"

"Go! Let me die where I am! I may deserve more than you think. I am a wretch."

"But, by Heaven! you are guiltless. I will swear it."

"You are mad!" and she put out her hands as if to keep him off, for he had reached the door and opened it. "You should have remained away. Don't you see that I am ready to meet my accusers? They found the dagger in the grass under a flower bush and I was at the house after midnight."

"Your mission I know was a legitimate one."

"You know nothing, I say, for you were not here last night and I have no secrets for your ears."

"My God! you are mad, girl!"

There was no reply, only the agonizing look he got from Lucy Lynx, and then he was pushed from the cabin and stood on the outside, stared at with grins by half a dozen toughs who had witnessed all.

He turned away.

"There is something too deep and terrible in this for me," he said. "It doesn't seem possible that she would murder any one. Yet, she admits that she was at the house last night, just as they've told me, and that they found her dagger in the grass. What does it mean, anyhow? I will go mad if I don't solve the mystery. No, I will solve it. I swear by the God above that Lucy Lynx shall never swing for the murder of the Silver King!"

He went down the street and entered the Black Bowie.

"It's pretty bad, boys," said the man behind the bar.

"But it's a lie!" was the retort and the hand of the speaker came down upon the counter and drew the attention of every one in the room.

"We'd like ter hev it that way, of course, but the evidence is ag'in' her, young and purty as she is—"

"Who says it is?" and the young man turned upon the crowd, his look a challenge for each and all.

"She killed nobody last night," he repeated. "Her hands aren't stained with Samson's blood—"

"Then, why don't she say they ain't?"

This seemed a poser, which for a moment silenced the lips of Willis Ware, the youngest tenant of Brimstone Bar and the acknowledged lover of Lucy Lynx.

"That's it. Why don't she come out and clear herself?" the tall tough went on, his searching eyes reading the young man's heart. "It's all ag'in' her as it is; she sits in the shanty and says nothin'. She admitted when we first saw her that she was at the house; that the dagger sheath which Lady Tiger found—"

"Did she find it?" interrupted the young man.

"Yes; she was seen to pick it up in the grass."

"Who saw her?"

"Durango Durg."

A smile suddenly appeared on Willis Ware's face, and he looked toward the bar.

"Something for the crowd," he said, with a wave of his hand then he quickly was on the porch outside, his face pale white, his lips closed with determination.

"I'll see her while the iron is hot," he said, moving away. "So she found the dagger in the grass? She is the discoverer of the link of guilt that seems to complete the chain of death around Lucy Lynx. I will see this Tigress!"

There stood in the prettiest part of Brimstone Bar a house not much unlike the others, and thitherward Willis Ware, the young prospector, bent his steps. He did not stop to remove the stains of mountain travel from his clothes, but knocked at the door of Lady Tiger's home.

He was shown into a little room, by a young woman with a dark skin, who told him that Lady Tiger would see him in a moment.

In a short time the graceful figure of Lady Tiger appeared in the doorway.

Young Ware shrunk from the look she gave him, a look at once soft and strangely mixed with triumph, and for a moment he seemed to forget in whose presence he stood.

"You will pardon me, Lady Tiger, but I have just come in, and they have filled me with incredible stories of the crime of last night. I want to hear a calm and dispassionate narrative—one not tinged with prejudice. You found the dagger-sheath in the grass. Is it possible that you are to throw her into the toils of the Black Tribunal?"

The face of the beauty of Brimstone Bar—the woman sometimes called the Queen of Sheba—

was turned fully upon him, and he tried to read her reply before it was spoken.

"I can't help what the finding of the dagger has forced me to do," answered Lady Tiger. "I found it, as they told you, no doubt—in the grass near the window of the room in which he was found dead."

"Had it been thrown there?"

"How do I know?"

"But the dagger itself?"

"I believe no blade has yet been found."

"But I was told that the wound was made by a dagger which just fits the sheath found under the bush."

"Doctor Dick has measured the wound, and the sheath, as well. One seems to prove the other."

The young prospector was silent for a minute.

"I will admit that the silence of the girl is against her. She refused to tell me anything."

"You have seen her, then?"

"I stopped at the cabin and found her distracted. Lucy Lynx will go mad if this strain is kept up long."

A gleam appeared in the depths of Lady Tiger's eyes.

"Isn't it her own fault?" she asked. "She refuses to confess—"

"Why should she confess?" broke in Willis, moving toward the woman so suddenly that she recoiled.

Lady Tiger recovered in a moment.

"We need not mince matters, however unpleasant they be," she said. "I believe I made use of the proper word. Until Lucy Lynx confesses, she will have no peace."

"What! do you, with the rest of them, call her guilty?"

"I look at this terrible case as it stands. This girl goes to Samson's house after midnight. Why? She refuses to tell. She comes out at an hour as yet unknown to any one save herself; her dagger's sheath is found—unfortunately, by me—in the grass near the window, while inside, in his chair, sits the man of ten mines—the popular Silver King of Brimstone Bar, dead—a dagger wound just over the heart, and the width of that wound the same width of the sheath."

"Woman, you torture me!"

"I can't help it. It is the truth that kills sometimes. This girl, whose motive is, as yet, known only to herself, refuses to unseal her lips, to tell what passed between her and Colonel Samson in that little room. Within a few hours the Black Tribunal will take active charge of the case unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless some friend of hers throws a dagger into her cabin."

The words seemed to transform Willis Ware into a living statue.

"Woe to the hand that tempts Lucy Lynx in that way!" he suddenly cried. "I will have blood for blood as sure as there is a just God in Heaven!"

There was no reply.

"Now, tell me one thing and I will go," he resumed. "You know something about the past life of Colonel Samson. Who was he?"

Lady Tiger could not help the recoil she experienced. A perceptible shudder seemed to send her back. Her white hands shut hard.

"Why do you ask me such a question?" she stammered.

"Because I believe two things—that you know who he was and why he was killed in his room."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLACK TRIBUNAL.

THE Queen of Sheba stood some time before Willis Ware with no color in her face, her hands clinched, and her eyes filled with a baleful gleam.

He watched her narrowly.

"I have seen strange things in this camp—things which I have kept to myself," he thought. "I have tracked this pythoness when she thought she was not followed, and I have a right, from what I have seen, to ask her to tell me who Colonel Samson was. By heavens! she shall answer me before I quit this house!"

It took Lady Tiger some time to recover from the startling effects of the young prospector's demand.

"You ask something I cannot grant," she finally said, looking at him with resolution written on her face. "Besides, why should I, more than any one else, know something of the life of the murdered man?"

"You will not tell me?"

"I refuse to be catechized."

"You refuse to speak the truth; you withhold it when you know its telling might save the life of one in the toils of the Black Tribunal! Who was Colonel Samson, and why did he come to Brimstone Bar? What is his past? And why was he stabbed to death at the dead hour of night, and why, too, was that dagger found under the bush just when some one was looking?"

"This is too much," cried Lady Tiger, now aroused, and her silken tread moved toward the door.

In an instant the door stood wide and with a sudden glance at him she pointed outwardly.

"You seem to have left your head outside," said she. "Go out and get it."

Willis stood undecided, and as he stood he heard a footstep in another room as if some one had been listening; but that door was not opened, and with a defiant look at Lady Tiger, he went forward.

"You will hear me," said he, as he paused on the step and turning once more, faced her. "I am going to fight this charge, step by step! I believe her innocent—I care not whether she opens her mouth or not. I shall go back and follow this crime step by step. Nothing shall be too dark for me! I shall spare no one, I care not who the guilty may be. I shall stand some day at the end of this mystery and woe to the hand that has been lifted against Lucy Lynx!"

The only reply he got was a derisive smile.

The woman's hand did not quiver; it continued to point through the door to the street.

He had barely left the house ere the yellow face of Captain Satin-Slipper's Celestial made its appearance, through the opened inner door, and Lady Tiger springing across the room, snatched from him the note he extended. This note she hurriedly read; then threw herself into a chair to pen a reply.

No Tung leaned against the wall and watched her and waited.

Lady Tiger sealed the note with wax which she melted over a candle lighted for the purpose, stamped the seal with the impression of her ring and handed it to the Chinaman.

No Tung, bowing almost to the floor, turned face to the street only when he had reached the door.

Once more Lady Tiger, now alone in the room, returned to the letter brought by the Celestial.

"I wonder what it means?" she said aloud.

"So the man who has been staying at the Black Bowie has dispatched a rider over the Red Trail? Sent him this morning, did he?"

Taking up the letter which had been written on coarse paper, she read:

"VASHITI:—"

"We must look out. The man who is at the Black Bowie—the queer specimen who calls himself Major Hollyhock—this morning sent his pard, Joe Jingle, booted and spurred, over the Red Trail. This was done immediately after hearing of the death of Colonel Samson. The question that naturally arises is: Whither is the rider bound? If he carries a message, to whom does he carry it? If I had discovered this sooner, I would have sent a man after Joe and we would have some light on this mystery. I have heard the finding of Doctor Dick and it is all right. Do nothing that will break the promised course of events."

"P. S.—The girl has not confessed and the Tribunal is almost ready to take up the case."

Having finished the re-perusal, the woman held the letter over the flame of the waxen candle and watched it till every particle was consumed.

"Let nothing disturb you, Captain Satin-Slipper," she said. "I will make no mistake. The girl let her zeal carry her a mite too far. She has placed herself in the toils, and, if she will not talk, must take the consequences. What, does that young gold shark threaten me? What all is he going to do? Hunt down the person who killed Colonel Samson? Then, in the name of common sense, why don't he go to Lucy Lynx's shanty and end his hunt?" and she laughed at her own words.

Meantime Willis Ware had gone to the little cabin he inhabited when the search for new pockets or veins did not tempt him from Brimstone Bar. It was not unlike the many others by which it was surrounded, and when he shut the door and found himself once more at home, he staggered to a stool and falling forward, buried his face in his hands.

He was undisturbed for nearly an hour, at the end of which time he was aroused by a step which halted at the door, and when he opened it, he stood face to face with Cyclone Kit.

"It's an unpleasant duty," said the big man, taking something from beneath his jacket. "I don't like ter hev ter do it, since we've been friends. I happen ter know that you're Lucy Lynx's friend, but you see they've made me messenger of the Court and—Hang it all, Willis, see what it says without any ceremony!"

It was a dirty piece of paper which the dark-faced speaker extended and the young man took it.

It was not sealed, merely folded, and the moment he had glanced at it he threw it at his feet.

"I know what it is," said he. "I am cited to appear before the Black Tribunal. I didn't kill Colonel Samson. Who had that order penned?"

"I don't know, but you know where the road is, boy."

"I do; and I don't intend to save myself by any display of cowardice. In the first place, the Tribunal has no right to cite me to appear before it. I am guilty of no crime, and I say here that I believe Lucy Lynx to be as innocent of the death of the Silver King as I am. Cyclone, I am sorry to see you into this mix—sorry that you belong to the Banded Brood of Brimstone Bar."

"What do you mean?"

"The Black Tribunal," said the young man at once.

"I can't help it," was the reply.

"What are you going to do with Lucy?"

"Try her."

"When?"

"I dare not answer you."

"Look here, Kit. We have always been friends. Don't you intend to give that girl a chance?"

"Why don't she talk?" was the quick retort.

"That is the same old cry. You don't know what secret she may carry in her bosom. It may be one of murder, but not a murder committed by her own hands."

"If she would tell why she went to Colonel Samson's that night and what took place there—"

"But she refuses to tell it; there! You can't unseal the lips of Lucy Lynx by threats. She will stand before the Black Tribunal as cool as ever a prisoner faced his accusers."

"Then, so much the worse for Lucy Lynx."

Willis did not speak.

Cyclone Kit looked at the half open paper lying on the floor.

"Won't you reconsider your resolution and obey the summons?" he asked.

"What will be the charge against me?"

"I can not say."

The young prospector stooped and picked up the paper.

"I am to tell you what I will do, I see. The messenger of the Tribunal will come for me at eight o'clock to-night if I obey. Tell the Court, Cyclone, that I will be ready—that I will face the Banded Brood of Brimstone Bar."

He spoke with the determination of a fearless soul and a look of pity lit up the deep-gray eyes of the messenger.

"It is dark long before eight o'clock," said Cyclone Kit, suddenly gripping Willis Ware's arm. "Your horses will be fresh by that time and you can be—"

"Hush, tempter!" broke in the young man. "You forget that Lucy Lynx is in the same shadow of death, and yet you want me to desert her like a coward! No! if a dozen Black Tribunals confronted me under the present circumstances I would not throw a leg over the saddle before the hour named in the summons. I know what it means, and I think I know, too, whose heart inspired it. I will be here when they come."

Cyclone Kit went to the door, turned and looking back for the last time, pointed toward the mountain, shook his head and withdrew.

"I see your hand in this, Lady Tiger," said Willis Ware. "I guess I went a little too far at your house; but, by heavens! I have nothing to take back."

The sun went down the western slope of the unclouded heavens.

Lucy Lynx had not passed the door of her little house since the first whispers of suspicion which connected her with the murder of Samson, the Silver King.

Maverick Moll, her sometime attendant, always found her on the little stool as if she had not quitted it once since the accusation.

Was the girl waiting quietly for doom? Did she know that the Black Tribunal had prepared the summons to its merciless Court?

In the bare room, his body probed by the knives of Doctor Dick, lay all that was mortal of the big-hearted nabob of Brimstone Bar, and not a man raised a glass to his lips at the numerous bars of the camp that he did not swear that the guilty should be punished.

But the Black Tribunal would do that. Ah, the Black Tribunal!

Lower and lower sunk the sun, painting for the last time that day the lofty peaks of the gold range.

Major Hollyhock had looked at his watch a score of times within the last three hours.

At last a horseman entered the camp at the west, and rode toward the Black Bowie. He did not even look up at the little window where the Man from Homespun stood with his eyes turned toward the setting sun.

"Ah, at last!" cried Major Hollyhock, when he caught sight of the rider, who was unattended. "The coolest of the cool has arrived. The Spotter from Spottersville—Cool Claude—is here. Thank God!"

CHAPTER V.

IN THE SILVER KING'S HOUSE.

THERE was nothing particularly striking in the appearance of the man who had entered the camp in the mountains. He was a common-looking person, dressed in brown, with a clear eye, a full beard and a fine figure, not unlike many at Brimstone Bar. In years he might have reached his thirty-fifth; he was active, as was shown by the manner in which he left the saddle in front of the Black Bowie and strode into the hotel.

Major Hollyhock watched the man until his figure was no longer visible for the porch which ran along the hotel, then he turned toward the door and eyed it, as if he expected the new-comer to enter the room.

Some minutes elapsed before the Man from Homespun was rewarded for his pains, and then the door swung open and the new-comer entered. He stopped beyond the threshold, and catching sight of Major Hollyhock, smiled and dropped his head.

"I knew you would come if Joe should find you," said the major, his little eyes glistening with delight. "You were there, eh?"

"I've been nowhere else for months," was the reply. "What is it, anyhow?"

"An unexpected mystery—a murder that will make your heart leap for joy."

"Come, tell me all you know while I rest," and dropping into a chair, the speaker crossed his legs and looked at the major.

Thereupon Major Hollyhock began and told all he knew about the death of Colonel Samson. He had for his listener a man who did not let a single word of the narrative escape him.

An hour later the man called Cool Claude was down on the streets of Brimstone commingling with the toughs of the camp and saying now and then that he had just come in from the West and was eager to find something to do, especially, and he always smiled at this stage of his narrative, if he could "strike it rich" and become a nabob like Samson had been.

The sun went down and Brimstone Bar became the roosting place of a thousand shadows.

Claude walked about the camp, now and then stopping to look in on a game which even the mysterious killing of Colonel Samson could not stop. He took no part, however, though he was looked at by the men of the Bar, and some seemed to wonder if he was not more than he pretended to be.

If he had never been to Brimstone before that night he learned its windings with astonishing ease for he would turn into a certain street and come out at a point which did not seem to be entirely strange to him. But, then, some men seem to know by intuition the outcome of the tortuous thoroughfares of the tumble-together mining huts that form the town of the Far West.

All at once Cool Claude stopped and looked back. Had he heard a footstep?

He was near the edge of the camp and shadows which were almost darkness itself had fallen round him. The mountain which the picks of Brimstone had explored rose above him, but now not a sign of life came from its gloom.

The man from Cinnabar was watching a certain spot in the trail behind him and while he stood there with his back to a huge boulder a curious smile wreathed his lips.

"Am I followed already?" said he. "Do they suspect that I am not Jack Juniper, the prospector—that I am really Claude Coldlock, the detective, summoned to Brimstone because of the death of its Silver King? Are they on my trail, and is this the first chapter of the battle for victory?"

If he had seen anything down the trail there was nothing there now, for all was still where he looked and the only thing that seemed imbued with life was a fox that glided past and vanished among the shades of night.

Claude stood a few moments like a statue against the rock and then moved on. But his eye was cast over his shoulder and it was keen enough to catch sight of the slightest sign of life behind him.

Twenty feet from the spot where he had halted he stopped again and crouched in the path.

"I thought so!" he said to himself in low tones. "I have some one after me."

This time there came on, gliding down the narrow trail which had been pressed by the feet of the miners of Brimstone Bar, a figure that had the tread of a rabbit.

It moved in crouching attitudes until it reached the very spot where he crouched. The next moment it passed him, going toward the mountain, and watched by the spotter till it disappeared.

"So it was the mute Celestial who is Captain Satin-Slipper's right bower," said Claude with a grin. "I thought as much from what I know. No Tung is ever on the alert, and has the tread of a cat and the spring of a panther. He serves his master, but always looks out for Number One. He never lets that escape him. A cool devil with almond eyes that weren't made for nothing. I shall meet him again."

The Man from Cinnabar did not follow the Chinaman, but re-entered the camp. He looked up at the house of death as he neared it. It stood in the most prominent part of town and was not hemmed in by the cabins of the miners. Colonel Samson had had everything his own way, and when he reared the handsome house—a veritable palace for that part of the country—he stipulated that it should not be touched by the shadows of the shanties that sheltered the toughs of Brimstone Bar, and his wishes had been respected to the letter.

Now the house which held at that hour no one but its dead master rose dark and grim among the trees which the band of the nabob had planted around it. It seemed to be invested with a mystery of some kind; there was about it a stillness that breathed of death, and Claude the Cool, watching it for some time, seemed to be impressed with a nameless horror.

At last he moved toward the house, and cross-

ing the space in front of it, stopped for a second and looked up at the closed windows.

In another moment he had moved to the rear of the house, and stood under the porch that ran along that part of the structure.

"It invites one, doesn't it?" he said, as if addressing some one. "I might as well begin where I am and, then, I would like to see the nabob before they bury him."

He went to the door ahead and found that the latch yielded to his touch.

To open the door was the work of a moment, and in a little while he stood in the house of the dead.

All at once a gleam of light passed before his eyes, and he heard a door open and shut.

"Some one is here besides myself," said he.

The light vanished and the noise was not repeated. Cool Claude waited some time, but hearing and seeing nothing more, went on again and stood in another room.

He was groping in the dark now, but the doors came handy to his hand, as if he had opened them before that night, and when he reached a certain latch he said to himself:

"I shall find it in here."

He entered the room where lay the body of Samson the Silver King!

The air was impregnated with the odor of a disinfectant, which told him where he was, and he began to walk across the floor, when he was startled by a sound that urged him against the nearest wall, and as a door opened he fell back and dropped into what seemed a corner curtained by some heavy goods that closed in front of him as he disappeared.

The Spotter from Spottersville was now fully aware that he was not the only living person in that room. He was aware, too, that a light had appeared, and looking out through an opening in the curtain, he beheld a man standing in the middle of the room with a waxen taper in his hand.

The face of this person was concealed by a mask which, falling down before the features, hid all but the chin, and this told nothing. The hands were delicate and womanish in shape, and the feet were incased in satin-like slippers that gave out no sound when they passed across the floor.

If there was any doubt of the man's identity it was removed when Cool Claude saw the slippers that glided over the carpet.

"So you are here, my captain?" he said. "I am glad to see you under Samson's roof and I shall watch you out of curiosity. What brings you hither? Ah, are you going to take a look at what Doctor Dick left when he went away?"

The mask moved toward a sheeted figure that rested on two chairs in the center of the room, and Claude saw one of the effeminate hands throw back the white cloth that hid the face.

Captain Satin-Slipper had come for a last look at the man he had known in life—the man whose death was to open one of the most exciting dramas of mountain life ever played in that part of the world.

There was something intensely cool in the movements of Captain Satin-Slipper as he lifted the shroud, and when he had looked for a moment into the face before him—a face which the keen orbs of the hidden detective saw from his place of concealment—he lowered the cloth, and smiled.

"It's all right!" Claude heard him say. "The mystery is too deep for them all—made so by the dagger which came and went without detection. What will the man do for Major Hollyhock when he comes? Nothing! What can he do in Brimstone?"

Claude, looking at the man, who spoke aloud, as if addressing some one at his elbow, could not repress a smile.

Captain Satin-Slipper knew that Major Hollyhock had sent somewhere for some one, but he did not know that Cool Claude was that person, or that he was even at that hour mastering the mystery that so baffled all others.

Captain Satin-Slipper stood some little time in the room of the dead, his light falling upon the sheeted figure on the chairs, when, all at once, he turned toward the very spot where the Spotter was concealed.

Cool Claude fell back to the wall and waited, ready to grasp the hand that should lift the curtain; but he was not required to do this. The curtain shook a little as if touched; then Claude heard him pass on with a light laugh.

"The deuce of it all is that the girl is in the toils," he muttered, talking to himself. "I don't like that one bit, but it can't be helped now. I did not know she went to the Silver King at that unseemly hour. What took her to him, and if it was nothing criminal, why don't she open her mouth? It is a pretty state of affairs and if she persists in running her neck into the noose of the Black Tribunal, why, she will do it and I can't help it."

Once more Claude parted the curtain before his face and ventured to look into the room again. He saw the figure of the masked dandy now standing near the door, but with one of his hands running over the wall, as if in search of something, for his eyes followed the hand and he had thrown the light of his candle upon the wall.

The searching fingers seemed to find something at last, for they stopped and a little door opened in the wall.

Captain Satin-Slipper stood on tiptoe and put his hand into the opening.

"There's where he used to keep it. I saw him put it there not a week ago, after showing it to me tied up and sealed. But, it isn't here now; no I can't find it and I can feel the whole interior of the niche."

He withdrew his hand with evident disgust and shut the secret door.

"Who took it away, or did he reconsider his resolution and destroy it himself?" he said. "It's almighty queer. I wonder if the girl knows? If she came here last night after twelve, she may have been shown the paper—No, why would he show it to her?"

Captain Satin-Slipper turned and came back toward the hidden spotter's corner. This time there was further search in his eyes.

"I'm in for it now," thought Cool Claude. "I would give a thousand not to meet this man here at this stage of the hunt for it may spoil all."

He made ready once more to receive the dandy of Brimstone; he felt a movement of the curtain, saw the glittering eyes of the man who was about to discover him; then the room was filled with the stunning report of a revolver.

With a wild cry Captain Satin-Slipper recoiled and dropping the light, pitched backward and fell in a heap at the foot of the door.

Claude the Cool stood in the dark, wondering what would follow the shot.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAT ON THE ROOF.

THE shot which seemed to have taken the life of the dandy of the camp had extinguished the taper and though the detective heard a door open, he saw no one; therefore, he could not tell who had entered the room, nor could he see the result of the shot.

Had Captain Satin-Slipper been killed?

Moments were hours in the mind of the Man from Cinnabar; he stood at the parted curtain trying to get a glimpse of the person who was in the room, for the opening of the door told him that some one had come in; but who was the man?

By and by the door made a noise once more and in the silence that followed Cool Claude stepped from his hiding-place.

He was now convinced that he and Colonel Samson were the sole occupants of the apartment, for he could not feel any body on the floor, and nothing but the dead man on his bier rewarded his moving hands!

Captain Satin-Slipper was gone, and if the assassin had taken him off he had done it with a good deal of nerve.

Following that trail was likely to prove a dangerous piece of business, so Claude went out with no such intentions, and gliding down the street, returned to the Black Bowie and slipped up to Major Hollyhock's room.

He found that person out, but resolved to wait awhile for his return.

He thought of the excitement that would follow the killing of Captain Satin-Slipper, wondered who had taken the life of the dandy of Brimstone Bar, and why; and was deep in these surmises when Major Hollyhock entered.

"The Tribunal has moved!" cried the major. "The girl—Lucy Lynx, has fallen into its grip. She has been arrested for the murder of Colonel Samson and still refuses to open her mouth."

A smile crossed the face of the Man from Cinnabar.

"Lucy must be a very stubborn young woman," he said.

"Stubborn to her own destruction!" was the reply. "Silence will only tighten the toils about her. There is no escape for the girl if she persists in her course."

"Which she is quite likely to do."

"Confound it, yes!"

"When was the arrest made?"

"Ten minutes ago. Where have you been?"

Claude Coldlock tilted his chair against the wall and looked into the face before him.

"Did you hear any news about Captain Satin-Slipper?" he asked.

"No; but I just saw him on the street."

"What, saw Captain Satin-Slipper on the street?" cried Claude, almost tumbling from his seat. "In the name of Heaven, has this silk-stocking as many lives as a cat?"

"What do you mean?"

Cool Claude had to laugh at the adventure he had just had. He had seen Captain Satin-Slipper pitch back after the stunning report of a revolver, had heard a door open and shut, bringing with it the sound of gliding footsteps of some assassin, and here Major Hollyhock was saying that he had just seen the captain on the street!

But, he did not betray himself.

"Where is the Court of the Black Tribunal?" he asked.

"That, I am told, is one of the mysteries of Brimstone Bar. It must be in the heart of one of the mines, but which one I have never been

able to learn, for it was too dangerous nosing around after the secret. The location of this merciless and remarkable Tribunal is not known outside of those who compose it, for it has never yet cleared a prisoner, therefore none have escaped to betray the place of trial and sentence. The girl, unless rescued, and that seems out of the question now, is doomed. She may be executed in secret, for that is one of the prerogatives of the Black Tribunal, and it is more than likely she will be thus dealt with."

"Won't the Court take evidence? Don't it ever summon witnesses in its own behalf, or allow the prisoner a chance to save his life?"

"God knows how it operates!" exclaimed the other. "All I know is that it is one of the most merciless tribunals the world has ever seen. Who would have dreamed that here, among these mountains, existed a court like that? I would have looked for flying men as soon as for an institution here like the Black Tribunal. Why, as I have told you, no one knows who compose its circle. I have my suspicion, though, that Captain Satin-Slipper and the woman we call Lady Tiger and the Queen of Sheba, direct its sessions; but, that is, as yet, mere speculation. I am almost sure that, powerful as he was among the toughs of Brimstone Bar, Samson, the Silver King, had no connection with this terrible Court. I don't say that he was not aware of its existence, for every now and then a human body swung from a limb at the outskirts of the camp, and pinned to it was the death sentence and seal of the Tribunal."

"Colonel Samson knew, then, that it existed; he knew, perhaps, who composed it, for if the Tribunal ever betrayed its operations to any living soul, it must have been to him. The girl goes into its clutches because she refuses to open her mouth and tell what she knows of the killing of the Silver King."

"Would the confession have saved her?"

"I don't know," answered Major Hollyhock. "Not if she had incurred the enmity of any member of that Court, especially of either of the two who are believed to be at the head of the Banded Brood."

"Who is this Captain Satin-Slipper?"

"Now you have me," returned the major, with a smile. I confess that to me he is somewhat of a mystery. I have watched him and his factotum, the silent Chinaman, time and again and the more I do it the deeper grows the mystery that seems to envelop them. Captain Satin-Slipper is as sly as he is handsome and oily. He owns a mine which amounts to nothing compared to even the least paying of the ten Colonel Samson left behind. He has all the money he wants and spends a good deal. I am told that he came here shortly after Samson, with the Celestial at his heels, as silent then as now. That Chinaman sleeps at his master's door."

"And knows the secret of his life?"

"Of course; if any living being knows all about Captain Satin-Slipper besides the captain himself, No Tung is that one."

"No Tung," said Claude, thinking of what he had seen at the edge of the camp, "No Tung is a yellow cat."

"And a serpent, as well, with a sting in his tail," added the major. "He turns up when you don't look for him and I have seen him shadowing Lady Tiger, playing spy on the very woman with whom his master is said to be in love."

"Do you believe that, major?"

"Only from what I have seen," was the reply.

"Captain Satin-Slipper seems very devoted to the Queen of Sheba."

"And she?"

"As fond of him," assumed the other. "I have seen so many queer things since I came to Brimstone Bar, that I can't remember all. This woman with two names is a puzzle. She is pretty, as you may have seen; has hands as white as snow and soft as silk. She can shoot in a marvelous manner, can throw the dagger straight to a mark and sing like a lark. I'd like to know what she can't do."

"But you have followed her a long time?"

Major Hollyhock started.

"I have watched her for some time," he confessed. "I have made it a business to watch this pantheress with the black eye and white skin. I came to Brimstone Bar for that very purpose and if she had discovered my mission—if she could have looked beneath my mask—who knows but that I might have known the location of the Court of the Black Tribunal ere this?"

"I guess you are right," and the Cool comrade returned the smile that wreathed the major's lips.

"I don't doubt it for a moment."

"There could have been no clashing between Samson and Lady Tiger?" suddenly asked the detective.

"None whatever; and it is queer considering the past of both. They met nearly every day, but kept the secret—by mutual consent, I suppose. I have seen them together time and again and no one not in the secret would have suspected the truth."

"Do you think it entered into the crime?"

The question caused a sudden start on the major's part.

"I don't know," he answered, hesitating. "That is to be a part of your work. You know why you have been sent for."

The cool man bowed.

"I have given my promise," said he, "and I intend to carry it out to the letter. The fate of this girl interests me. I have seen something to-night that whets my desire. I am going to the end of this trail and to the end of the other one, as well, in spite of the Black Tribunal."

"I want to warn you," and Major Hollyhock laid one hand lightly on the spotter's knee. "I want you to enter into this matter with your eyes open. I believe that if my identity was known I would find myself in the coils of the Black Tribunal before morning. I have played a cool hand here; I have been near to this strange man now dead without his once suspecting me. I have stood at the very elbow of this woman whose wiles have enmeshed Captain Satin-Slipper without being suspected. I have mingled with the members of the Court which I believe is manipulated by these two persons, carrying, day in and day out, my life in my hands. I have been even tracked by this panther in yellow, No Tung, the Celestial, and have baffled him. He has gone back to his master with nothing upon which they could base anything against me. Now, if you are successful, Claude, I shall rejoice."

The Man from Cinnabar arose and went to the window. Looking down upon the Square he scrutinized the figures visible there for a few seconds and then came back to Major Hollyhock who had watched him closely all the time.

"What of the girl's lovers?" he suddenly asked. "She must have such, for beauty carries its snare wherever it is."

"I forgot that," was the answer. "Yes; Lucy Lynx has a lover—"

"But one?"

"I am not prepared to say just now, but I know of one who ought to be happy, for the girl loves him."

"His name?"

"Willis Ware. He is a young prospector who is out of town now, but who is liable to come back at any time, as Lucy admitted to me with a blush but yesterday. If he should come back now, he would be shocked, and might by some indiscreet move follow her into the grip of the merciless Court of the camp."

"Willis Ware!" murmured the detective. "I would have thought the girl might have captured Captain Silver-Slipper, as her beauty is fresher than Lady Tiger's."

"Lucy never liked this dude desperado," averred the major. "I can't say that her beauty never caught him, for I know what he thinks of pretty faces and black eyes; but Willis Ware carried off the prize. I trust the young man will not come back if the girl is to perish at the hands of the Banded Brood."

Once more Claude looked toward the window, then, suddenly springing up, he bounded across the room and threw up the sash.

"A moment too late!" he said, coming back with a smile, which did not answer the questioning look that filled the major's eyes.

"What was it?"

"A cat on the roof."

"A human cat? I understand. Did it drop to the ground?"

"Yes; just as I looked."

"But you saw it?"

"For an instant."

Major Hollyhock did not speak for a minute.

"That is the third time. I recall the others, now," said he, after awhile. "The first time was a week or so after my arrival. I saw a figure on the roof—saw it for a moment, as you have seen the one that just escaped. The next time was some days later, when the same scene was repeated. I promised myself to shoot the next thing, cat or man, I found on the roof."

"If you had seen the object just out there, and killed it, there would have been a funeral in Brimstone."

"More than one funeral, perhaps," grinned the major. "It was the same cat. You need not name him, Claude. We will have to deal with this animal before this game has been played out. Now, we must do something for Lucy Lynx."

"But she is in the coils."

"The more reason why she should be saved."

The detective would have spoken again if at that moment a heavy step had not come up the narrow staircase and halted at the door.

CHAPTER VII.

COOL CLAUDE'S GRIT.

"COME in!"

It was Major Hollyhock who answered the knock, and while both men looked the door opened and a tall, robust man stood before them.

He was a handsome fellow, broad of shoulder like the majority of the toughs of Brimstone

Bar, and his long, black hair fell over his dark collar in rich profusion.

He touched his hat to Major Hollyhock and his visitor, but looked the hardest at the latter.

"I guess you're the man," he said at last, addressing Claude. "I have something for you."

"Be sure you're right," remarked the major, with a light laugh.

The tough smiled, and drawing a letter from beneath the folds of his brown jacket, he extended it to the Man from Cinnabar.

As Claude took it, the tough fell back to the door, where he stood like a giant still looking at the new-comer and seeming to measure his physique in silence.

Major Hollyhock, wondering what the letter could contain, watched Claude as he opened and read it.

Was it warning or threat?

When Cool Claude looked up from reading the note, his countenance, placid before, had not changed.

"Well?" demanded the man in waiting.

"Do you want my answer in writing?"

"It's not necessary if it be short," was the rejoinder.

"Very well. It shall be short enough for you to remember. Tell them I shall remain!"

The big man touched his hat once more and disappeared, and the two friends were again alone.

For a little while Claude did not speak, but dropped the letter into Hollyhock's lap.

The major read:

"JACK JUNIPER:—

"Your presence is not needed in Brimstone. You will remain here from the reception of this at the risk of your life. THE JUDGE."

"They have spotted you. This is from the Black Tribunal."

"I thought so," was the answer. "You heard my reply? I shall remain!"

"And dare one of the most powerful and secret courts ever organized since the Inquisition."

"I don't think it is quite so bad as that, but I shall remain all the same."

The courage of this man was remarkable. He spoke with calmness and no one would have thought he had sent defiance into the teeth of the dread Tribunal of Brimstone Bar, from which a victim never escaped.

"Claude, I release you," announced his employer. "It was not my intention that you should serve me to this extent. I will fight this Court alone and win or perish. I shall remain here and take care of the case before me—the one which has called forth my patience and my nerve, if I have any, these ten years. You are free to go back."

The dauntless detective looked down into the upturned face of the man whom he came to serve, while his hand descended with the softness of a snowflake upon his shoulder.

"I never leave a fight till it has been fought out," he said calmly. "You forget, major, that a young girl's life is in the toils."

"But she is nothing to you. You have never seen her."

"That is true."

"More, Lucy Lynx can never be anything to you more than she is at this time. I mean—"

"That she has a lover? I understand the situation. You shall not fight this horde of ruffians alone. I have been in your employ long enough to know you and to love you. I know, in part, why you have taken up this battle—why you are here in the Sangre de Christo. I thought of everything before I sent the man off with the message."

In a moment Major Hollyhock stood erect and his hand was out.

"You're a man among men, Cool Claude. They have marked you already, and the machinery of the Black Tribunal will be used against you."

"I will meet it!"

Major Hollyhock picked up the letter and read it again.

"Who wrote that?" asked Claude.

"I don't know; but wait!"

The major opened a trunk in one corner of the little room, and diving one hand into its depths, pulled out a packet tied with a yellow string.

"These were written years ago and a thousand miles from Brimstone Bar, which then had no existence," said he, untying the packet and tumbling its contents upon the table.

Selecting from among the letters one, he opened it and laid it beside the warning from the Tribunal.

Claude the Cool leaned forward and compared both letters with his eagle eye.

"Who wrote that one?" he asked, touching the one taken from the packet.

"A woman called then Dora Dispard."

"Ah! you have told me about her and her wiles. She penned it, eh? And not to you?"

"No, to him."

Once more the detective looked at the two letters.

"The same hand wrote both," he said, at last.

"But years have intervened."

The major nodded.

"I think as you do. The letter taken from the packet was written by Dora Dispard; the warning from the Black Tribunal by Lady Tiger."

The answer by the ferret of the mountains was a smile.

"You don't identify her by this, do you?"

"No," returned the major quickly. "I have traced the resemblance before to-night. I haven't watched this beautiful serpent of the Sangre de Christo in vain. Look at the formation of her t's and e's."

"The identification is complete."

The major returned the letter to the packet and handed the warning back to Claude.

"When do you think the Court will take its first step?" the detective asked.

"It is liable to be taken at any time. The Black Tribunal is swift and merciless. Those who are at the head of it will not stop at anything. They have collected about them people of their own stamp and the game being played now—the game which drew Lucy Lynx into the toils—is but a sample of their infinite villainy. The man lying dead over in 'the Palace,' as we call Colonel Samson's house, was never struck by the girl's hand."

"Of course not."

"But the mystery is her silence when accused of the crime. She went to the house—went there after midnight—"

"For what?"

"Ah, that is it!" exclaimed the other. "I might tell you something, Claude, but the time for the revelation has not yet come."

The Man from Homespun went to the door and listened.

While he held it ajar, listening to a hum of voices that came up from the bar-room, he was studied by the handsome fellow who had come from Cinnabar.

Cool Claude stood erect, a half smile on his lips and intense ardor in the depths of his gray eyes.

"What was that?" he suddenly demanded, springing to the door, as an oath, coupled with the name he had assumed, came up from below. "The rascals down there seem to be discussing my running qualities. I must face them sooner or later, so why not now?"

"No, not now—not till we have heard from the Black Tribunal and the case of Lucy Lynx."

"Ten to one that he runs away within the hour!" proclaimed the same voice with an emphasis that seemed to harden the lines of the detective's fine face.

"The 'sometime' shall be now!" fell from his lips.

The Man from Homespun, awed by the man's sneer and manner, fell back and let him pass, a six-shooter gripped in a hand soft as that of a young girl.

The door at the foot of the steps opened into a small room beyond which lay the bar-room.

Cool Claude entered this anteroom but stopped in the center, for a sudden spring into one of the dark corners told Claude that he was not alone there.

At that moment the door leading into the bar-room was opened and the head of a man appeared in the light.

"Wait till the answer comes back from the Court!" commanded a harsh voice, and the person at the door was seized and pulled into the lighted bar-room. "The man up-stairs can't get out of the house if he wants to. We have him in a net, as good a one as we ever set for a fool!"

The door swung shut, but the gleam of light which had fallen into the room showed Claude the Cool the object crouched, panther-like, in one corner. It was human, and the funny eyes and yellow face almost drew a peal of laughter from him.

He sprang upon the Celestial, for No Tung it was, and lifted the squirming Chinaman to his feet.

"Playing cat again, eh?" he said, forgetting that the one to whom he spoke had not spoken for years. "I'll just show you to your friends!"

He dragged the mute across the room, threw wide the door, and confronted the toughs in the bar-room.

"Here's Captain Satin-Slipper's spy!" he cried, flinging No Tung into the astonished crowd, and found himself covered by a dozen revolvers!

In reply he threw up his own weapon and looked over the barrel.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE THE TRIBUNAL.

It was true, as Hiram Hollyhock had announced to Cool Claude, that Lucy Lynx had fallen into the clutches of the Black Tribunal.

The girl sitting among the shadows of her little home, had been waited on by two stalwart men and at the first knock on the door she had looked up with a sigh of relief. Anything seemed a change from the dread silence by which she was surrounded.

They came in and stood before her, rough-looking fellows.

"You want me? You are from the Tribunal?" Lucy queried.

"The truth is, we ar'," was the answer, the men looking abashed.

"I am ready. I have been waiting for you," She stopped long enough to tie up the long

hair of raven blackness that had fallen loose over her shapely shoulders, and when she went to the door and looked out upon the stars shining upon Brimstone Bar she must have thought that, perhaps, she was seeing them for the last time, for a scarcely audible sigh escaped her lips.

With a stalwart on either side she was marched away till they reached a certain point in the camp where the shadows lay thickest, when one of the guards touched her arm.

"We must blindfold you, miss," he informed her. "This is the rule and we can't let it go for any one."

"I don't object," the girl assured.

The guard drew from his bosom a dark handkerchief with which he proceeded to blindfold the prisoner, for such she was, and Lucy thought he was doing it in a bungling manner, as if his heart was not in the task.

This work done, she was led on once more and not until she realized that she was underground did she hear one of the men speak again.

"We are almost there. I hope you're not tired, miss," he said.

"Not tired, but anxious," was responded.

Half a minute later both men halted at a command which had a peculiar sound, and in a little while a glimmer of light came to the bandaged eyes of the young woman.

"The prisoner is here!" announced the man on her left, and Lucy felt his hand leave her arm for the first time since the blindfolding.

She was led forward again, but this time only a few steps, when the handkerchief dropped from her eyes.

The girl was in the chamber of the Terrible Tribunal!

She fell back from the light with a cry, and threw her hands to her eyes, but the next moment the light seemed to decrease and she could look.

She had been conducted to an underground place, large enough for the session of a more pretentious court than the dread one by which she was to be tried for her life.

Standing around the four walls of the room with black masks concealing their faces to the chin were to be seen the Banded Brood—the secret pards of the mountain town.

All were stalwart fellows, as Lucy could see, and, though trying to pick out certain ones by some peculiarity of figure, all were dressed so alike, she had to score a failure.

At one end of the room rose a dais, upon which stood a rough-looking chair with arms of buffalo-horns. Facing the chair was a desk-like arrangement, in front of which hung a dark cloth bearing in large characters of white the sign of the Court—a noose looped around the letters "B. T."—the "Black Tribunal."

Lucy had been conducted to the center of the room and left there by the guard.

She faced the Judge's throne, but at the same time could not help looking at the motionless figures ranged around the wall. The black masks seemed to fascinate her.

She was thus engaged when a door back of the desk opened without noise and a man similarly disguised came forward and took the chair.

Lucy smiled for the first time since entering the court-room. It seemed to her that she knew the Judge—knew him by a certain motion made as he took the seat; but she betrayed her discovery by no outward sign.

"The Court of the Black Tribunal is opened," proclaimed a voice behind the girl and the men along the wall stepped out a pace and lifted their hands as if renewing an oath of some kind.

"The prisoner is before the Court," said the Judge. "She has been summoned to answer to the most terrible charge that can be brought against a living being. She stands charged with having taken the life of Colonel Samson—with having entered the house of the Silver King of Brimstone Bar for that purpose. It is the duty of the Black Tribunal to bring the guilty to justice. What says the prisoner at the bar?"

All eyes were turned upon the girl standing uncovered in front of the platform. The masks seemed to lean forward in their eagerness, but not a sound broke the silence, though Lucy at that dread moment heard the flutter of the brave little heart in her bosom.

"Guilty or not guilty?" demanded the Judge of the Tribunal as not a word dropped from Lucy's tongue.

"Not guilty!"

Lucy Lynx had spoken at last. There was a slight movement among the black masks and the wearers looked at one another.

"Not guilty, eh?" repeated the Judge, bending down over the desk. "You would not speak before. You admitted that you went to Colonel Samson's house—that it was past midnight when you crossed his step, yet you say you are not guilty of shedding his blood."

"I have answered you!" decisively spoken.

"You mean that your answer to the charge is to be the only one this Court is to hear from you?"

"The only one!" promptly.

"Don't you intend to tell why you went to the house, nor what took place there?"

"That is for for me to keep."

The masks seemed to smile beneath the velvet. "There is a chance for you," urged the court. "The Black Tribunal aims to punish the guilty. You forget that a dagger-sheath, admitted to be yours, was found in the yard in front of the Palace—that the wound over Colonel Samson's heart was made with a blade of the very width of the sheath. How do you answer this evidence?"

"I don't answer it at all. You have heard my reply to the charge. In the sight of Heaven, I am not guilty of the murder of the Silver King of Brimstone Bar. Beyond this I will not go. From this point I am silent!"

The decision of the girl seemed to strike the men in the underground den as the acme of nerve.

"Did he send for you?" asked the Judge.

No answer.

"Was it the first time you had been to the Palace?"

"The first time."

"Why didn't you go earlier?"

There was no reply.

"You were seen to come out of the house, not like an innocent visitor, but in a gliding manner with your form muffled and keeping in the darkest shadows you could find."

The face of Lucy Lynx did not change.

"Girl, this is not child's play. This is the Court of the Black Tribunal," continued the man on the bench. "You are on trial for your life. You are in the hands of eternal justice, and your escape depends on yourself."

"I have spoken," responded Lucy. "I have told you that I did not take the life of Colonel Samson. I went to the house—it was after midnight. I came away, leaving him alive and perfectly well. I never saw him afterward."

"But why did you throw the dagger sheath under the bush?"

"I can not tell you that."

"Ha, then you threw it there?"

"Yes, I did!"

The silence that followed was almost startling. The admission was terribly against the girl.

"You did not have to admit that," said the Judge. "You might have avoided the question by silence, but, since you have spoken boldly, you must feel that you have damaged your cause notwithstanding your denial of the charge of murder."

Lucy Lynx met the eyes that glowed behind the mask with a quiet smile.

"Did you emerge from the Palace under oath?" was the next question.

"Under an oath I took myself and within myself."

"It was not suggested by Colonel Samson?"

"It was not."

The next moment the figure in the chair seemed to straighten. The eyes of the Judge of the Tribunal were fastened upon the girl prisoner and for half a second not a sound broke the stillness that prevailed.

"Since you have sealed your lips with an oath—since you admit much that is against you—the visit after midnight—the casting away of the dagger sheath and the attending circumstances, the Black Tribunal must judge you by the evidence in hand!"

The voice seemed to have changed; it was now a voice of doom, and Lucy Lynx, looking at the Judge as if she would penetrate the velvet mask and look into the eyes beyond, waited for the verdict of the deadly Court.

There now came out of the room back of the platform a masked figure which placed in front of the Judge a black box, and immediately withdrew.

"The jury will now vote upon the guilt or innocence of the accused!" said the man in the chair.

Lucy turned at the first footstep at her side. One of the men had moved from the wall and she saw that as he advanced toward the desk he held something in his hand.

The ballot was dropped into the little box and the man went back to his place. Another and another came forward and cast his vote that was to tell the fate of the hapless girl.

The last one had done so, when once more the attendant came forth and opened the box.

As he took each bit of paper from its depths he held it for a moment in mid-air and then laid it at the Judge's elbow.

The watchful eye of Lucy Lynx could see that every piece bore a somber hue, and when the last one had been counted and laid with its companions, a half-scornful smile for the rough proceedings overspread her face.

The Judge leaned forward and looked at the ballots for a moment.

"The jury of the Black Tribunal has spoken," said he. "It has adjudged the prisoner at the bar. The verdict is—Guilty!"

There was no demonstration; the figures along the wall did not move.

Lucy Lynx stood for another moment as motionless as a statue, then, as if suddenly imbued with life, she darted forward, and before any one could prevent, she sprang up the steps leading to the bench, and her hand was at the mask of the Judge.

She attacked him with a tigerishness that he

could not resist, and all at once, with a cry that rung through the court-room, she jerked the velvet off and revealed his face.

"Look! that is the Judge of the Banded Brood of Brimstone Bar!" cried Lucy Lynx, falling back and confronting the astonished man on the platform. "That is the creature who is playing this hand for himself. Behold, men of Brimstone, the serpent whom you serve—the man who, knowing more about this crime than I do, dares to ask me who killed Colonel Samson. He can not wrest from me the secret which I learned last night. He can not tear from my bosom the knowledge with which I came out of the house where lies at this hour the corpse of the Silver King of Brimstone. This Court may send me to the noose; it may end the career of Lucy Lynx, but it shall gain nothing by this second crime. That man shall reap the whirlwind, and the plot for millions shall end over the spurned corpse of the wretch who calls himself Judge of the Black Tribunal—Captain Satin-Slipper!"

"Seize the prisoner!" shouted the white-faced man on the platform.

It was done at once, and Lucy Lynx found herself once more in the grip of the dread Court of the Sangre de Christo Hills.

CHAPTER IX.

THE THREE MASKS.

In a moment the doomed girl was hurried across the room, a door opened in the wall, and she and her escort vanished.

"It is not too late yet," said a voice in the dark, for Lucy found herself in a place as gloomy as the tombs of the Ptolemies. "You know more than you have told. Tell us what became of the will, and we will aid you to escape the noose."

"The will? What will?" cried the girl.

"The last will of Colonel Samson."

She had been permitted to stop in the dark, but the hands of her escort were still at her wrists.

"I could not find it," she said.

"Did he show it to you?"

No reply.

"Come, don't lose your life on account of a bit of paper. He came to your house some time ago; he brought you that will and you witnessed his signature."

"My God!" cried the girl. "Who told you this?"

"Never mind. What became of it?"

"You have my answer."

"Away with her, Jack!"

Lucy Lynx was taken on again and into another room which was dimly lighted, and there she was left alone before she could even look at her guards.

The lamp that burned on the table in the middle of the apartment threw a sickly light around and she staggered forward and found near the lamp a piece of paper which had evidently been placed there for a purpose.

Snatching it up, she read with her heart in her throat as follows:

"There is but one chance to escape the noose of the Black Tribunal. You will write on the back of this note whether you will confess everything to the writer. Nothing, not even the interview in the Palace, is to be kept back. Upon this depends your lease of life. Remember, you are in the clutches of the Banded Brood of Brimstone Bar. Be wise and discreet!"

The note was crumpled in the girl's hand as soon as she reached the end and turning from the table, she threw it upon the floor.

"That is my answer!" she cried. "I know where I am. I realize everything; I know now why I have been thrown into the toils. I knew something before, but everything is plain now. They would not take my plea of not guilty; they twisted circumstances to suit themselves, and the head of the Tribunal will know in time that the plot for the millions of the dead man—for the riches of Samson the Silver King, was his own destruction."

Then, as if for the first time becoming unnerved since her arrest, Lucy Lynx's fortitude seemed to give way and she fell to the floor in a swoon which was an admirable counterfeit of death.

She did not see the door that swung open at one side of the chamber, nor hear the step that crossed the floor.

The masked maker of that step came forward and picked up the note which she had flung away.

Turning it over, he looked at the blank side and glancing at Lucy, fell back with a shake of the head.

Once he seemed on the eve of going back to her, but changed his mind and retired.

The prisoner of the Black Tribunal came out of the swoon with the little lamp still burning on the table. She was still the sole occupant of the cell, and the bare walls told her the story of no hope.

She passed her hand across her brow and arose. With an effort she went to the table and then, recollecting the note, began to look for it. Its absence told her that some one had been

in since her fainting—that she had been visited, perhaps by the writer of that note.

"Why didn't I keep my senses?" she cried. "My God! I would have seen that person. I would have spoken to him for this dreadful secret of mine is an hourly torture. Am I to die here? Oh, Willis, why did I refuse to tell you all?"

She stood in the middle of the room with hands clasped, and eyes containing a strange stare, and going to the table sunk upon the only stool there and bowed her head upon the rough board.

More than once in muffled tones she spoke the name of the young man who had come back to Brimstone Bar to fall himself into the hands of the very men who had netted her.

Willis Ware, the young prospector, ordered to appear before the Black Tribunal, had, as we have seen, promised that he would be ready for the escort when it came.

"What do they want with me?" he asked himself, not knowing that at that very moment Lucy Lynx was confronting the dread court of the hills, nor that it was passing a sentence of death upon her.

He waited in the shadows of his little shanty. He saw them grow denser, and wondered if the messengers of the Court would be "on time."

They did not disappoint him, but came to the very minute, and he, with a smile, stepped out into the starlight and went away with them.

Willis Ware was taken over the same ground trod by the feet of the girl he loved. He was escorted down the same dark corridor with his eyes bandaged, and when he had entered a certain chamber the handkerchief fell off, and he stood in a room with walls of stone, but, unlike Lucy, before no one.

The only light that showed him how he was situated was a small lamp set in one of the dull niches of the walls, and he started toward it, seeing at a glance some writing on the stone.

There were letters there; they formed a rude scrawl; and when Willis Ware leaned close enough and read them, he uttered a sharp cry.

"This chamber has been inhabited before me," he said. "It has held other victims of the Black Tribunal, and some of them have left their thoughts on the stone. Let me see. What is this here?"

He read aloud:

"I was lured to my doom by a face as fair as a seraph's, but it was the face of a fiend. Let the man who comes after me curse, as I am sure all must who enter here, the name of Lady Tiger, the Queen of Sheba."

Willis Ware read every scrawl on the wall before him. He took note of the handwriting, showing that more than a dozen men had preceded him to the dungeon of the Banded Brood, and when he had finished the reading, he turned to his little light and watched its flicker for a moment.

"Why don't they come and let me face my accusers?" he cried. "I am eager to face the Black Tribunal of Brimstone Bar. I said too much to Lady Tiger; I asked her one question too many. She spoke, and I am in the net of the secret league."

Minutes went and he did not stand before the Court of the gold hills. He paced the floor of the dungeon like a restless tiger, but the door through which he had walked into the place did not open and he was not permitted to face the weavers of the death web.

"I wonder how Lucy fares?" he suddenly cried. "She was under espionage because she would not tell what passed in the Palace during her midnight visit. Has she fallen into the hands of the Tribunal? Will they dare try her for a crime of which she cannot be guilty? Ah, my God! the Banded Brood are ready to do anything."

All at once a slight sound startled him, and he stood erect, while he looked in the direction from which it seemed to have proceeded.

A door opened at the furthest end of the chamber, and three men came in.

The last one to enter closed the door.

For a moment a smile rose to Willis Ware's lips as he saw that all wore masks of black, while they were clad in miners' jackets of brown.

They belonged to the Court he had longed to face, even though it might be to his own destruction.

The three men looked at him as they came forward and halted in front of him.

"I have been waiting for you and you find me ready," said the young prospector. "Where is your Court?"

There was no answer, but the men looked at one another and seemed to smile.

"You heard me?" said Willis. "I am ready to meet the Black Tribunal. You have come to escort me to it. Lead the way."

"The Court has tried you, Willis Ware," said the foremost of the three. "You have been judged without your presence. We are the executioners of the Tribunal."

Tried and sentenced! Found guilty of what?

No wonder the words he had just heard sent a nameless thrill to the youth's heart. Condemned without a word in his own defense! He had heard of high-handed proceedings, but never of

any thing like this. He was aware that the Black Tribunal carried on its work with a cool hand, that it was all-powerful where it had been organized, but to convict a man in a manner like that was the height of infamy; it was enough to call forth a protest from the ranks of the Tribunal itself.

A minute passed before Willis Ware could credit the evidence of his ears.

The three pairs of eyes were fixed upon him, and it seemed to him that beneath the black masks were smiles which told him that the decree of the Court gave its executioners delight.

"So I have been tried!" he exclaimed, starting forward. "I have been sentenced to death and you are the executioners. What was the evidence?"

There was no reply. The shadows on the floor, blending into one, did not move.

"By the living God! you must tell me something," the prisoner went on. "You won't carry out the decree of your infernal Tribunal without giving me a hint of how the verdict was reached? I demand it. Was I convicted on the word of—"

He paused. The name of the Queen of Sheba was on his tongue, yet somehow-or-other, he did not utter it.

He saw the masked executioners waiting for him to end his sentence, but he never did.

"Are you through?" asked one at length.

"We can't remain here all night."

Willis Ware threw a quick look around the chamber. He discovered what he had not seen before or, if seen, he had not taken notice of it.

It was a beam set in the wall, but as he gazed at it, the horrid thought that it projected far enough to become a gibbet flashed across his mind.

He had been confined in the death room of the Black Tribunal!

Condemned beforehand, sentenced in advance of his apprehension, and without a chance to speak in his own behalf.

The three men in domino saw the glance he threw at the beam.

At the same moment they slipped their right feet in advance of the others and moved toward the prisoner.

Willis Ware noticed the movement and fell back to the wall, halting under the beam.

Now one of the three drew from under his jacket a coil of rope, which he opened, displaying a lasso's noose.

"Hold!" cried Willis Ware. "I know what that means. You shall not catch me like a Greaser," and he stepped out from under the beam and came toward the three.

For half a second he stood there, looking at them and measuring strength and distance, then, all at once, with the suddenness of a lion, he caught up the little table and hurled it full in their faces!

Three men went down before the novel weapon, and the young prospector, in the desperation of the moment, bounded forward and tore away at the door in the wall.

But, heavens! it seemed to have become a part of the stone.

CHAPTER X.

NO TUNG AND HIS MASTER.

THE Spotter from Spottersville, when he opened the door leading into the bar-room of the Black Bowie and threw No Tung; the mute Celestial, into the midst of the toughs congregated there, astonished them as they had never been astonished in all their lives.

And when he lifted his hand, displaying his six-shooter, which looked them coolly in the face, they were taken aback, and some even lowered their own weapons and sought to escape the glitter of the eye that seemed to single them out for destruction.

No Tung, glad to escape without a broken head, squatted in one corner of the room and wondered, as his eyes indicated, what the outcome would be.

"We have you at our mercy," said the head tough and the one nearest the Man from Cinnabar. "You can't shoot all of us and, besides, we know what brought you ter Brimstone."

The latter part of this statement was not true, and Cool Claude met it with a smile of derision.

"I seek no quarrel with any man," said he. "I am here on my own hook from this time on, and I will defend myself to the last extremity."

For a moment longer the brave man faced the crowd with the uplifted revolver, when one of its members called out with a laugh that the best way out of the difficulty would be a drink all around.

Cool Claude understood what this meant. It was a breathing spell for men who were under orders.

"Shall it be so?" asked the tall man in front.

"You make the terms," was the reply.

"Then, a drink it is," and the lifted weapons fell and with coarse jokes the crowd surged up to the counter and bottles and glasses were set out.

As for the Man from Cinnabar, he did not move, but kept his station and looked on.

"What, don't you drink with us, Jack?"

"Not this time. Good-night, gentlemen," and to the amazement of all Cool Claude turned and vanished.

The crowd looked into each other's faces. Cool Claude was in the dark room beyond the bar and they heard him going back up the stair.

Not until then did the Chinaman move. He came toward the counter and carried one of the glasses of whisky to his lips, his eyes snapping like a serpent's all the time.

"Did you think you were shot from a gun?" asked one of the toughs laying his hand on the Celestial's arm.

No Tung turned at the tough and grinned, but it was a grin of deep maliciousness and the next moment he had sprung from the room.

He ran down the narrow street and entered a house at the end of it.

Throwing wide a door, the Chinaman appeared suddenly to a man who looked at him in amazement.

In an instant the mute had caught this person's arm and his fingers moved rapidly.

"The devil you say?" cried the man in the chair. "Where did it happen? At the Black Bowie?"

No Tung who had watched the lips of the speaker, nodded.

"Go on and give me the particulars. Take that chair and talk on your hands. You know I can understand you if you don't go too fast. Now, go ahead."

The Chinaman dropped into a chair and elevating his yellow hands above the top of the table began to talk with his fingers.

Captain Satin-Slipper watched his man with eagerness and did not lose a single motion of the flying fingers.

No Tung told the whole story of the meeting at the hotel and it was well told, too.

"That man is as cool as a cucumber," said Captain Satin-Slipper at the end of the narrative. "He is no ordinary person and is the one sent after by Major Hollyhock after the death of the Silver King. We must attend to him; you think so, don't you, No Tung?"

The little head of the Celestial nodded emphatically and his eyes seemed to get a new glitter.

"Attend to him we will," continued Captain Satin-Slipper. "He looked 'shoot,' did he? What does he expect to do among fifty? I would like to see him run things to suit himself at Brimstone Bar. Why, the Black Tribunal would never stand it."

The Dude Desperado of the mountain-camp took a cigar from a box at his elbow and pushed the others toward No Tung. One of the long yellow hands of the Chinaman moved forward and selected a weed, which he placed between his lips and sucked it without lighting.

"What are you thinking about, No Tung?" asked Captain Satin-Slipper.

Instantly the fingers began again and while the handsome tough watched them, a smile wreathed his lips, and he suddenly burst into a laugh.

"That was years and years ago," he said. "You don't mean that, my boy?"

"I mean that and nothing else," said the fingers of the Celestial.

"But, you must remember that she came from the North and you say on your hands that she came from quite a contrary direction."

No Tung looked puzzled for a moment and then said in his usual way:

"Captain Satin-Slipper forgets that No Tung has seen a good many years—"

"I know that; you are older than you look and have been all over America. I forget nothing; but you may be mistaken."

There was no reply. No Tung fell back in his chair and sucked the cigar.

All at once Captain Satin-Slipper arose and crossing the room, touched a concealed spring in the wall and a little door flew open.

Thrusting one of his silken hands into the opening, he drew forth a small pocketbook with which he came back to the watchful Celestial at the table.

"There's nothing like convincing evidence," said he, opening the pocketbook and looking at the almond eyes that let nothing escape them.

The following moment he tumbled the contents of the pocketbook upon the table, and in an instant the hand of No Tung, darting across the board, snatched up something which he held up in the light and grinned.

"You knew it the moment you got sight of it, did you?" smiled Captain Satin-Slipper. "That ring proves a good deal. my yellow boy."

No Tung was not looking at Captain Satin-Slipper now, but at the ring which he held between finger and thumb.

It was a gold ring with a setting of rubies—a ring of no great value intrinsically; but its presence in the pocketbook taken from the concealed niche in the wall told that it was not without some value of another kind.

"That is the ring," Captain Satin Slipper went on. "If somebody knew where it was, there would be a pretty bit of playing here before morning."

The Chinaman continued to look at the ring and did not lift his eyes.

"Did she wear this ring when you knew her?" asked the Dude Desperado.

No Tung slowly shook his head.

"I thought as much. Don't you see you have mixed two women? You have the wrong one in your head to-night. Lady Tiger never came from the South at all."

"But No Tung has seen the ring," said the rapid fingers of yellow.

"Where, pray?" asked Captain Satin-Slipper.

In reply the lithe body of the Celestial was thrown half-way across the table, and he lay there, looking into the face beyond with the gleam of a tiger cat.

"Does Captain Satin-Slipper want to know where No Tung saw the ring?" his fingers said.

"He saw it for the last time on the fingers of a beautiful woman whose name was not Lady Tiger. Men did not call her the Queen of Sheba then; they had another name for her, and it was not so very long ago. It was far away in another camp, where she ruled till they found her out. There was a murder one night. A nabob who had smiled upon her, and who had six mines, was found dead in his chair, with a dagger-wound in the heart. What do you think the men of Red Vulture did? They could not hang her, for they had nothing for real evidence; but they gave her ten minutes to leave town, and she walked out at the muzzles of the revolvers of the gulch."

"Did you see that, No Tung?"

"Yes. It was before we came together."

Captain Satin-Slipper did not speak for a second.

"Was this ring on the fingers of that woman when she went out from Red Vulture, an exile?" he asked.

"No Tung saw it then for the last time."

"And you are sure that Lady Tiger and the beautiful exile of Red Vulture are one and the same?"

"No Tung has a good memory. He forgets nothing."

"That is a new chapter in her life history," said Captain Satin-Slipper. "I don't see why you have kept it back till to-night. But, never mind; better late than never. What became of her after the exilement? Did she ever return to Red Vulture?"

"They posted her."

"Ah, it would have been death to have returned?"

"It would have been death."

Captain Satin-Slipper put up the ring and returned the pocketbook and its contents to the hole in the wall.

"Has she recognized you, No Tung?" he asked, coming back to the table.

"No. No Tung is to her a stranger. We have never recalled the past."

"I have seen her looking at you when you did not suspect her."

"Oh!" said the fingers, while their owner smiled, "that is nothing, captain. She admires good-looking men wherever she sees them."

Captain Satin-Slipper broke into a light laugh at the Chinaman's wit, but immediately started up and stood erect at the edge of the table.

"You make me forget the man at the Black Bowie," he said. "We must attend at once to Jack Juniper, though that is not his name."

No Tung said nothing.

"I have already set the screws against him. He was found with Major Hollyhock, was he?" The Chinaman nodded.

"They have met before to-night. This is the man for whom Major Hollyhock sent, after the death of the Silver King. No Tung, what do you think about that? Is the girl guilty?"

A sparkle came at once into the almost hidden eyes of the man from the Flowery Kingdom.

"You have arrested her. She is in the grip of the Tribunal," his fingers said.

"But that is not what I asked you. Is she guilty?"

"You will hang her for the murder of Colonel Samson."

"Hang it all, No Tung! you are bound to evade the question. I know you. Are you afraid to express an opinion to me?"

No Tung seemed to retire within himself. He dropped back into the chair and looked as immobile as an iron statue.

For a moment Captain Satin-Slipper gazed at him, and then said:

"Keep your thoughts to yourself, if you don't care to ventilate them. You are right. The girl, Lucy Lynx, is in the grip of the Black Tribunal. There is no escape for her, unless we—"

Captain Satin-Slipper did not complete the sentence, for a light step turned his attention to the door across the room, and the next instant it opened, and the Queen of Sheba stood on the threshold.

Lady Tiger never looked more beautiful than then.

Her proud figure was drawn to its true height, and her black eyes, fringed with lashes of raven darkness, rendered her a person to be admired.

Captain Satin-Slipper started at sight of her, and the dumb Chinaman, biting his lips, stared while he kept his place.

Lady Tiger looked first at the Dude Desperado and then at No Tung.

"So I've caught you in conspiracy?" she said, as she came forward. "Captain, will you oblige me by sending that yellow rattler out of the room?"

The jeweled hand of Lady Tiger covered the gazing Chinaman, and No Tung, looking at his master for an explanation of the sentence, moved back and stopped.

He seemed to know that it had been against him.

Captain Satin-Slipper turned to his pard and told him to go.

The next second the Celestial had stepped in front of Lady Tiger, and giving her a look out of his blazing eyes, deliberately left the chamber.

That look made the woman clench her hands.

"That means war," she said, under her breath.

CHAPTER XI.

BANISHMENT OR WAR.

OUTSIDE the room, his eyes still on fire, the Mongolian stopped and glared at the door.

If ever he wished for ears it was then, for, despite his affliction, he leaned toward the portal like one about to listen and catch what was passing beyond it; but all at once he turned away and strode down the corridor.

Meantime Lady Tiger had approached Captain Satin-Slipper and was meeting his questioning look with one equally severe.

"Why do you keep that serpent about you?" she asked at length.

"For one thing, he saved my life once," was the reply.

"At the risk of his own?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure he took risks?"

"I am. He had odds against him and yet he rushed in and got me out of an unpleasant place."

"It is gratitude, then?" and the lips of Lady Tiger were seen to curl half derisively.

Captain Satin-Slipper made no reply, but looked away.

"That man must go!"

The Dude Desperado of Brimstone Bar turned with the quickness of a cat and faced the Queen of Sheba.

"Don't ask too much."

"I ask my rights," she said. "I ask that the cat of Brimstone seek other quarters—that is all."

"I am indebted to him."

"Pay him off."

"You can't pay in money the kind of debt I owe that man."

Lady Tiger smiled.

"You refuse to send him off? You are willing to keep here this yellow serpent, who is a perpetual menace to my happiness?"

"Ah, how can that be?"

The woman started.

Captain Satin-Slipper thought of the ring he had just returned to the niche in the wall and of the story told by the man who had just stepped out.

Was it all true? Had No Tung seen this beautiful creature driven from the mountain camp at the muzzles of a dozen revolvers? Was this a part of her life history?

Lady Tiger waited a moment for his reply when, as it did not come, she came nearer and laid one of her hands on the edge of the table.

"You won't send him off?" she said. "You intend to keep him near you to sting your friends—to watch those who are his betters? If he gets a dagger for his pains you must not complain, Captain Satin-Slipper. If your Mongolian never goes back to the Flowery Kingdom you must not blame any one but yourself. This man saved your life, did he? He will never save mine."

Captain Satin-Slipper watched the play of rage in the eyes before him and waited till it had subsided a little.

"We'll dismiss this subject," he said. "There is another more important. The man at the Black Bowie has been warned that he remains here at the risk of his life."

"The man who came in within the last few hours and calls himself Jack Juniper?"

"The same."

"And what does he say?"

"He defies the Tribunal."

"A cool head," smiled the woman. "I like such men, but this one is here for a purpose."

"Major Hollyhock sent for him."

"That dooms him; that is enough. And the major himself?"

"Oh, we can deal with him at any time."

"He is not a coward. The man from Home-spun has interfered with no one since coming here, but all the same he is dangerous."

"What, have you figured him out?"

"Not yet; that is, I don't know why he is here, but he is not in Brimstone for speculative purposes. He has invested in no mines; he comes and goes when he pleases, and, as yet, no one has fathomed him. I have looked back and can find no man who resembles him

enough to let me suspicion that he is here in disguised. A strange man, and dangerous because strange."

"When is the funeral?"

The abruptness of this question, changing the subject so suddenly, startled the Queen of Sheba.

"It will take place to-night," she said, recovering.

"On the mountain?"

"Yes."

"There will be no demonstration?"

"None at all."

Captain Satin-Slipper crossed his legs under the table and said coolly:

"I think we should have given the prisoner a chance."

"Which one?"

"The girl."

In an instant the face of Lady Tiger grew as white as death.

"She would not confess, and yet she had time. She did answer the charge, but there was the dagger-sheath—the visit to the nabob after midnight, the coming out of the house in the shadows of early morning, the visit of Samson, the Silver King, to her house some days ago; the hot words overheard there by one who listened. You forget all this, Captain Satin-Slipper."

"I forget nothing," was the reply.

"Well, it is too late now."

A quick start was the answer.

"What, is it done?" he cried.

"The sentence of the Black Tribunal has been carried out."

"So soon?"

"You did not think we would delay it on her account, did you? You take an uncommon interest in this fair murderess. You were among the first to swear that the slayer of Colonel Samson should pay the penalty, yet, when she has paid it, you start and repent."

The black eyes were on fire again, and Captain Satin-Slipper looked nonplused.

"The next step must be as cool a one as the work of the Tribunal," resumed Lady Tiger. "The will of the dead man is to be read in presence of the camp."

"What will?"

"Why, bless you, where have you been all this time? I thought you knew that Samson left a will—that he willed his ten mines and his millions to one able to take care of them."

"I knew it was rumored that a will existed, but I did not know it had been found."

"It has been found," said the Queen of Sheba, speaking with a deliberateness that was coolness itself. "I hold it in my possession."

"You?"

"Why not? Don't you know that if it fell into other hands it would not be safe?"

"Who is the legatee?"

A smile overspread the face bending down till it almost touched the white countenance of Captain Satin-Slipper.

"My dear captain, behold before you the sole legatee of Colonel Samson of Brimstone Bar!"

Captain Satin-Slipper almost bounded from his chair.

"The—deuce!" he cried. "What, you the sole heir of that man?"

"The sole heir."

He fell back, staring at her as if she had spoken the startling words for the sole purpose of surprising him.

But she was as calm as a summer's day and not a sign of deceit appeared in her deep eyes.

"Show me the will," he cried.

"On one condition."

"What is that?"

"That this night yet you give that yellow snake of yours his papers."

Captain Satin-Slipper did not move.

"I won't tolerate him here another twenty-four hours. If he remains over to-night, by the soul that gives me life, I am liable to shoot him on sight!"

"Shoot No Tung? In God's name, woman, why this sudden revulsion?"

The agile figure of the Queen of Sheba straightened and she looked down upon the man in the chair.

"He has watched me. I have found him at my heels of late. I can't go anywhere without hearing his tread behind me. I am always in his shadow. Speak. Shall this monster go?"

Captain Satin-Slipper would have argued the question, but the woman was immovable.

"I don't want to have to pit my cunning and determination against this slave of yours," she said. "I have made up my mind that but one of us shall live at Brimstone Bar. It lies with you to say which one shall stay."

The Dude Desperado was in a quandary. He did not want to send off the man who had saved his life, and who, even then, was his protecting shadow, yet, to save him, he might have to bow to Lady Tiger's dictation.

The Queen of Sheba drew off and quietly looked at him.

With welded lips she gave him time to make up his mind and when he had sat silent for ten seconds without looking squarely at her she said:

"You will keep him. You will force me to

make war on this yellow snake from Catbay. I shall, and it will be war to the knife—perhaps literally so!"

"Beware, then! No Tung is dangerous."

"So am I," and the speaker showed her white teeth. "I am more than Lady Tiger."

"That is what he says."

In a flash she was leaning toward him, and Captain Satin-Slipper saw he had made a mistake. His tongue had spoken against his sober judgment.

"So he says I am more than Lady Tiger, does he? There! don't tell me what your slave has told you, perhaps this night. I don't want his lies repeated."

Lady Tiger walked to the door and laid her hand on the latch, her finger clutching it as if she would pull it off.

"The Black Tribunal has passed sentence upon two to-night," she looked over her shoulder at Captain Satin-Slipper. "They have felt the noose ere this. It shall not deal with this man from China. I am judge and executioner in his case. I am the person who takes care of the man with the silent tongue."

The Dude Desperado sprung toward her.

"I will send him off!" he cried. "For heavens sake, don't lift your hand against No Tung. You might be the sufferer."

"I? I will run that risk."

"But he shall go."

The Queen of Sheba seemed to cool down.

"When?" she asked.

"Right away."

"I consent to wait till daylight. If the sun finds that man at Brimstone Bar I turn upon him."

The latch clicked, the beauty of the gold camp looked once more at Captain Satin-Slipper and was gone.

"No Tung did not lie," said he. "She is the lone exile of Red Vulture."

CHAPTER XII.

A CELESTIAL'S SECRET.

"JEHOSAPHAT! bound to get even with No Tung!" said Captain Satin-Slipper when the door had closed upon the figure of the Queen of Sheba, and he was alone once more. "The Mongolian is in the shadow of death and if he is here when the sun rises, he is likely to run afoul of a knife."

He sat a moment longer when he took his departure, going out to look for the man proscribed by the beauty of the camp, and hoping to convince the Celestial that it was his duty to get out of Brimstone Bar as speedily as possible.

There was no compromise with a creature like Lady Tiger.

But he could see nothing of the man from the Flowery Kingdom and inquiries failed to run No Tung down.

If he had looked in the right place he would have found the object of his solicitude, but he never thought of hunting for him there.

No Tung, after leaving the house of the Dude Desperado with the soft white hands, had crossed the Plaza and gone in direction of the house of the dead.

There was an eager look in the almond eyes of the Chinaman.

Slipping across the yard in front of the Palace with the tread of a cat, No Tung entered the house and made his way, not to the room from which the body of Colonel Samson would soon be borne, but to another chamber near by.

This was the dead nabob's private room, a queer looking place with a handsome desk in one corner and chairs around.

No Tung lighted a lamp and shaded the light from the window that looked out upon the street.

The Celestial seemed to know as much about the interior of the Silver King's house as he did about Captain Satin-Slipper's abode.

In a short time he fell to examining the desk, which he unlocked; but it seemed to yield him nothing. He went from this to the drawers of the table, but they were not locked and easier to search. One after the other he looked through, his yellow fingers running hither and thither like mice through their contents until all had been searched.

It was evident that No Tung was looking for something that persisted in keeping away from his fingers.

He turned away at last with a look that spoke of disappointment.

All at once, however, he stopped and looked at the wall.

He had caught the sudden glitter of something in the light of the lamp.

A light bound carried the Chinaman to the spot and in a moment his finger had touched a button and a little door, not larger than his hand, moved aside.

Into the opening popped the hand of No Tung, but it was almost immediately withdrawn.

The hand was empty!

Not satisfied with this, the mute Celestial stood on tiptoe and looked into the opening.

Nothing there!

He dropped back with a look of a tiger-cat in his eyes.

"He looked like a man who had been robbed, though he had accidentally discovered the hole in the wall."

He turned away from the wall when he fell back with open-mouth and stared at the apparition that had entered the room.

No Tung was no longer alone in the private chamber of the dead Silver King.

The Chinaman was forced to the wall with horror depicted on every lineament of his yellowish face; if he had held the lamp in his hand, he would have dropped it, but it was upon the table and beyond his reach.

Slowly advancing across the room, with eyes that, while they seemed to transfix the Chinaman, did not see anything, came a figure tall and ghostly.

It was the figure of a young girl so strangely clad that she seemed scarcely human. Her step gave out no sound and No Tung, hugging the wall, trembled for his life and did not move, though he wished the wall would give way and drop him somewhere.

The figure continued to advance until the white hand, until then concealed in the folds of the ghostly dress, was lifted till it touched the button which he had pressed.

The door in the wall flew open again.

No Tung expected to see something deposited in the place, but instead the hand was thrust in as if its owner was hunting for something.

When the hand was withdrawn the figure looked about the room and went out.

Drops of perspiration stood out on the brow of the man from China.

It was moments before he moved, and when he did he almost fell forward.

It was the first time he had ever heard of the ghost of the Palace, and his nerves were unstrung.

He opened the door, the same one through which the specter had departed, and vanished.

More than once he looked behind him, but saw nothing.

He passed through several rooms, but did not stop to search them. He had seen enough, and when he emerged into the open air and saw the stars glittering in the cloudless vault of the firmament, he slipped away and turned up in the little room he sometimes occupied when not sleeping at Captain Satin-Slipper's door.

No Tung lay curled up in bed until he was awakened by a shake.

Captain Satin-Slipper had found him at last.

Springing up, he leaned toward the man he served and was taken down into the little room where they generally held their conferences.

"I have been hunting high and low for you," said the Dude Desperado of Brimstone Bar.

No Tung nodded wonderingly.

"I am sorry, but I have promised to dismiss you."

A quick start and the sudden gleaming of a pair of eyes followed these words.

"You need not go far," continued Captain Satin-Slipper. "The time will come when you can come back, for I swear that I will not part long with you. Don't blame me, boy. I am doing this for your good, for she has recognized you as an old acquaintance and, then, she says you have been tracking her."

The almond eyes seemed to laugh.

"Before you go, No Tung, I want to know something. You have tracked her, haven't you?"

The Chinaman, who had been watching his master, gave his usual nod.

"What have you discovered?"

In an instant the yellow fingers came up and began to move.

"Not so fast; there is plenty of time," said Captain Satin-Slipper. "You don't have to make yourself scarce for some little time yet, and we have an hour or so on our hands. I say you have watched her? Did you see her last night?"

There was no reply beyond a curious look in the eyes before Captain Satin-Slipper.

"What, do you intend to keep something from me, boy?" he exclaimed. "You were out last night, and your eyes tell me that you saw something connected with the death of Colonel Samson."

"No Tung hasn't said so," said the hands.

"No, but I can read expression."

The Celestial came toward Captain Satin-Slipper and his hand dropped upon his shoulder.

The yellow face was put down until it almost touched his own white one, and for a second the eyes of Caucasian and Mongolian met.

"You saw her last night!" cried Captain Satin-Slipper.

No answer.

"Why didn't you tell me before? Why did you keep this secret till now?"

No Tung continued to look, but he did not move.

"By heavens! I have a mind to choke you before you go," and the hand of Captain Satin-Slipper clutched the Chinaman's sleeve and his fingers sunk into the man's arm.

"Don't you know that the Tribunal has dealt with the girl—that she is dead, and by the hands of our Court?"

"Who judged the white girl?" asked No Tung.

"I couldn't help it. You know how the jury voted. It was unanimous. The vote stood for

death and it had to be respected. The Black Tribunal has never rescinded a sentence."

The face before the Celestial had no color at all. Captain Satin-Slipper looked into the Chinaman's eyes and seemed ready to tear him to pieces.

"I might have saved her," he said at last.

"You, the Judge of the Black Tribunal?"

"Even I."

For the first time the face of the Celestial broke into smiles.

"She is stronger than you there," said the flying fingers. "Captain Satin-Slipper could not have saved the white girl."

"Curse you, I could have tried!" was the retort. "I could have played a desperate hand, and I would have played it if you had not sealed your lips till now."

The rage of Captain Satin-Slipper was terrible.

He dropped No Tung's arm and sprung to a table. Tearing open a drawer there, he snatched out a revolver and with it advanced upon the astonished and grinning Chinaman.

"I intend to end the matter here," he grated. "You need not fly from the hands of the Queen of Sheba. I shall kill you where you stand, and—"

He broke his own sentence and lifted the six-shooter.

No Tung did not move, but folding his arms, stood immobile in the middle of the room and looked calmly into the muzzle of the madman's pistol.

"What have you to say for your act?" asked Captain Satin-Slipper.

Once more the fingers went to work.

"My God, you come back at me in that way, do you?" the Dude Desperado said. "You remind me that you once saved my life. But you have killed Lucy Lynx by your silence. You have sent her to her death by the noose of the Tribunal. I have canceled the debt I owe you. I gave you a home; I gave you all the money you asked for. You have slept under my roof for years. I can't spare you, for I have paid you back in full for the deed of Yellowbird Ranch."

There was a tightening of the fingers at the butt of the revolver; the light that shone in Captain Satin-Slipper's eyes boded ill for the Celestial when the yellow fingers moved once more.

"If No Tung falls dead at the feet of his master, the secret will be kept by the dead," said they.

Captain Satin-Slipper had not thought of this.

"If Captain Satin-Slipper shoots No Tung, he will lose a friend in time of need."

The revolver was not lowered.

"No Tung will go away, but he will not tell his secret now. It all rests with Captain Satin-Slipper. He loses a friend when he touches the trigger. No Tung may have killed the white girl by keeping back his secret; but he has not saved the guilty—not for long."

Captain Satin-Slipper, with an execration, flung the revolver to the floor.

"I spare you!" he cried. "I won't take your life, though you deserve to have your wall painted with your brains. When will you tell what you know?"

"Maybe never."

"Go, anyhow. Go, and get as far from me as possible. I won't keep back the hand of the Queen of Sheba if you remain; but I will let her carry out her threat."

The Chinaman bowed, with one of his hands on his breast. He looked into the eyes of Captain Satin-Slipper as he recovered his position, and then with a gesture which the Dude Desperado did not fully understand, turned and coolly walked from the chamber.

"That man is the incarnation of demonism and coolness," averred Satin-Slipper when the door had closed behind No Tung. "He knows who killed Colonel Samson. He may have seen the crime committed, or, what is more, may have committed it himself!"

He picked up the revolver and restored it to the drawer, then went to the window and looked out.

The stars shining upon the dusty street in front of the house showed him a figure standing erect, where it was plainly visible.

"That is not No Tung," said he. "That is a stranger—a man I have never seen."

He touched the panes in his eagerness to get a good view of the figure in the road.

"It is Major Hollyhock. No, I am mistaken again. It must be the man who came last—Jack Juniper, though that is not his name."

At that moment the figure turned and walked away.

Captain Satin-Slipper was right.

The man in the street was the new-comer from Cinnabar—Claude the Cool.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPOTTERSVILLE SPOTTER AT WORK.

MORNING came.

There was a fresh grave on the mountain-side, and all that was mortal of Colonel Samson rested therein.

The funeral had been undemonstrative; the toughs of Brimstone Bar had carried the body to the graveyard, and some one delivered a short

eulogy over it ere it was lowered out of sight; then all had tramped back to drink to the repose of the murdered man's soul, at the long bar of the Black Bowie.

Somehow or other the threat against Cool Claude seemed to have been looked over, for he was still an inmate of the hotel; not only this, but he walked the streets with a coolness that, under any other circumstances, would have won him friends.

But the eye of the Black Tribunal was fixed upon him, and his outing was, as many expressed it, "only a breathing spell."

Nothing was to be seen of the Celestial, and when Lady Tiger, gazing from her window, saw the tall figure of Captain Satin-Slipper cross the Plaza without the Mongolian at his heels, she smiled to herself and looked satisfied.

"He has kept his word with me and the rattle-snake is gone," said she. "I did not want to have to carry out my threat, but I did not intend to tolerate such a spy at my heels. Why didn't I recognize him before? It all came to me like a flash of light. There was a Mongolian at Red Vulture, and what bothered me was the fact that these yellow rats look alike. Now, I know him; now I recognize the man who stood apart in Red Vulture and grinned while I went out of camp at the muzzle of the Vigilantes' revolvers. And he was abroad the other night! It was his figure I nearly stumbled over in the shadows. I wish I had turned on him then; but never mind. His master has sent him off and it is death for him to show his yellow hide back in Brimstone Bar."

The sun, coming up, illumined the streets of the mountain camp and fell as well upon a figure creeping down a path among the dark hills beyond it.

This creeper was the exile of Brimstone Bar—the Celestial who had been sent away to escape the knife of the woman of three names.

More than once the stolid-faced Mongolian stopped and looked back as if he thought of returning and braving all the dangers he had left. He showed no emotion of any kind as he crept from shadow to shadow; his little eyes would now and then emit a sudden light which would die down almost as soon as it flashed up, and when he turned a bend in the tortuous trail and could no longer see the roofs of Brimstone Bar, he waved his hand in that direction and was gone.

Something was to come of this forced exilement of the mute in yellow. Something was to follow this sudden departure of the man with a secret, and woe to the woman who had brought it about!

The forenoon was wearing away when the tall handsome figure of Cool Claude appeared on the porch of the Black Bowie and stood there for a moment.

"That man is coolness itself," said a certain person who was watching him from the window of one of the nearest houses. "He came down when Major Hollyhock sent for him and the messenger did not depart until after the death of Colonel Samson."

"That is true."

Quick as thought almost the person at the window turned and faced the last speaker.

"I did not know you had come in, Cyclone Kit," said the startled one, who was Lady Tiger.

"I did not intend to surprise you, but I could not help hearing your comment."

The Queen of Sheba smiled and held out her hand.

"Here, look at the new arrival. You can see him from the window."

The tall, robust figure of Cyclone Kit came forward, and for some time he looked at Cool Claude, as he stood on the porch smoking as quietly as if he were in a pen of sheep and not the tenant of a den of lions.

"He's got a frame capable of endurance. Look at that breadth of chest; and the boys who saw him throw No Tung into their midst at the Black Bowie, say he is as quick as a cat."

"I don't doubt it," was the reply. "I would like him if he were not our foe."

Cyclone Kit did not answer, but continued to regard the man from Cinnabar, watching him as he coolly knocked the ashes from his cigar and enjoyed his morning smoke.

"Is he to have all the rein he wants?" suddenly asked the stalwart at last.

"You know what was sent him last night?"

"Yes, well, there he is in defiance of the warning."

"I know. Jack Juniper sent it back with his answer that he would remain."

The next moment Lady Tiger and her companion saw Cool Claude throw his cigar into the street and step down from the porch.

He came straight toward the house in which they stood.

"Elegance in good clothes," said the woman, watching him from behind the curtain. "Look at the strides he takes; they're as cool as the man himself."

Cyclone Kit glanced at the admiring woman and saw color suddenly abandon her face.

"He is coming here!" cried the Queen of Sheba.

"Oh, I guess not—"

"But he is, I tell you. See! his eyes are fastened on the house and I am to have this cool head for a visitor. In heaven's name, why does he come to see me?"

"He may be partial to female society, therefore he hunts up the foremost lady of Brimstone Bar," smiled the big miner.

Meantime Cool Claude had reached a spot in front of Lady Tiger's house which left no doubt of his goal, and all at once the Queen of Sheba seized Kit's arm and forced him across the room.

"Don't let him see you here," she exclaimed. "I haveno idea what this man wants of me, but I am able to take care of myself. Go, go, Cyclone, and if this meeting must not be a secret, you shall know all."

Cyclone Kit turned away and left Lady Tiger waiting with a calm exterior for the man who was about to invade her home.

She heard the feet of Cool Claude on the step of red cedar, and at his knock opened the door and stood face to face with the man who was to play an important part in her career.

Cool Claude touched his hat as he entered the house, and when he found himself inside he paid a compliment to the neat arrangement of everything he saw, and drew a smile to the lips of the woman of the camp.

What was his mission? What would he say first?

Lady Tiger, with a woman's *finesse*, opened the ball, and hoped that he was finding Brimstone Bar a pleasant place; but not a single reference to the crime of the nabob's Palace.

"I had heard of Brimstone Bar," said Cool Claude. "I think I shall like the place if they let me alone."

Lady Tiger started.

"What! have they disturbed you?" she asked.

In reply a light smile came to the lips of the Spotter from Spottersville, and he replied:

"A mere bit of play, I suspect. It may be the manner of initiation here. I can't say."

"We have some queer men in Brimstone, like all other mountain towns."

"And a master of all?"

"I can't say that I understand you. You have heard—"

"Of the death of the Silver King? Of course. I could not escape hearing of that, you know. It was sudden and mysterious. Killed at night, and by a young girl, too, if what I have heard is correct."

There was no reply. The Queen of Sheba was looking at him with a placid face, as if she had already recovered from the unexpected visit.

"By the way, what has become of Lucy Lynx?" asked Cool Claude.

"You should ask the Tribunal."

"Ah, the Tribunal!" he exclaimed. "That is your secret Court, I understand?"

"It is the law of Brimstone Bar."

"Like the Vigilantes of old California?"

"Yes."

"But I am all the time getting from the errand that brings me to your house, Lady Tiger."

Now were the woman's eyes riveted upon him. He was coming to the import of his mission.

"You have not always lived here?"

"No. This camp is not old, and, then, I came here long after its founding by Samson, the Silver King."

"Alone, Lady Tiger?"

"Quite alone."

"And have been here ever since?"

She nodded and her dark eyes dropped.

"It is a curious mission, mine is," he went on. "I am trying to unravel a mystery which involves a good many thousands—indeed, I may say that the fortune I have to bestow upon some one is as great as the fabulous one left behind by Samson."

She looked up and was watching him with the eagerness of one doubly interested.

"Some years ago a man suddenly left the States and became a wanderer beyond the Mississippi. He has been traced here and there and nearly all that time by a golden trail. Wherever the man went he left a mark which I have followed until lately. I have stood as I believe at his grave. I have discovered that he died somewhere in the mountains and was buried by Indians who attended him in his last sickness. Thus died one of the early bonanza kings of the West, leaving behind him a mass of riches in mines which belong to-day to a woman whom he married years ago. I am on the hunt of this wife; I have taken up this case on my own hook; I have traveled over miles and miles of territory meeting hundreds of women who were ready to be regarded as the widow of the bonanza prince; but I have not discovered the true one."

The face of the Lady Tiger was a study now. There was a twitching of the finely chiseled lips, and the little hands bali hidden beneath the folds of her dress seemed to shake.

"Who was this man?" she asked.

"He called himself last—he had more than one name—for he changed it when a whim seized him—Mark Mayfield."

"And he died where?"

"At a place called Lightning Ranch."

For a moment there was no response, then Lady Tiger, drawing her figure back in the chair and putting out her hands, said:

"Do I look like the widow of that man?"

Cool Claude appeared astonished.

"You, Lady Tiger?" he exclaimed. "Are you the one-hundred-and-first claimant of the dead man's millions?"

She laughed, but in an instant became calm.

"I asked you in all seriousness," she said.

"Did you know Mark Mayfield?"

"I married him once."

Cool Claude broke into a laugh.

"Come, this is a surprise that amuses me. You the widow of this dead client of mine; you Morella Mayfield?"

Lady Tiger looked at him without speech.

"There is a proof which the real claimant can furnish and none other," he answered.

"And that is—"

"The ring by which Mark Mayfield wedded his wife."

The Queen of Sheba held out her hand and the detective leaned forward and studied it.

"You don't wear the gold ring with the ruby setting. You can't prove your right to the dead man's millions by any jewels on your hand now."

"No? Then, I will show you something convincing."

Lady Tiger arose and stepped to one corner of the little chamber. Throwing aside a curtain that hung there, she disappeared, the folds falling gracefully behind her, and the Spotter from Spottersville waited with a smile for her return.

It did not seem long when Lady Tiger came back, a singular look in her eyes, and with hands clinched and breathing hard she found her way to the chair.

"I have been robbed of the ring!" she said.

"I had it when I came to Brimstone Bar—"

"The ring with the ruby setting?"

"Yes."

The mountain detective smiled.

"It is the same old story," he said. "The other claimants have failed to show the ring."

"But I had it! By the living God, I was the wife of the man who died at Lightning Ranch!"

"And the woman who was exiled from Red Vulture, too?"

Lady Tiger recoiled with a startling cry.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRAIL OF THE RING.

THE detective's query seemed to have fallen like a bolt from the cloudless heavens.

The woman from Red Vulture!

That seemed to have opened up a terrible past and the beautiful creature of Brimstone Bar, standing near the wall, was staring at the cool man who had dared to put the query.

"What manner of man are you?" said Lady Tiger at last. "In heaven's name, who are you?"

Cool Claude saw that the woman had betrayed herself.

"You have not the ring with the ruby setting," he said. "You say you had it once, but that it has been stolen."

"That is true. I had that ring. It was yonder behind that curtain, and I was guarding it, though I thought it so safe that I had not looked after it for years—not to take it out of its box, I mean."

There was no reply.

"You don't believe me," she went on, coming forward again. "You are looking for the wife of Mark Mayfield. He left behind a number of mines, did he? Where are they?"

The Spotter from Spottersville looked up into the face before him and seemed to study it.

"I must tell you one thing which might stand between you and the reaching of his wealth," said he.

"Well?"

"And that is, the present state of affairs in this camp."

The Queen of Sheba reached the table and was looking at him with all the intensity of her aroused passions.

"If I prove my identity nothing shall stand between me and my dues!" she answered him.

"I am the woman I represent. I am the wife of Mark Mayfield. The ring was in my possession until a short time ago. I have been robbed and if you will give me time I will get it back."

"Then, you suspect some one?"

"I think I know. There has been in this camp until a few hours ago a sneaking dog in yellow and his fingers are long and his eyes keen."

Cool Claude did not speak.

"Why don't you tell me what is going to stand between me and the mines of Mayfield? We had no children. I am the sole heir."

"But there is the banishment from Red Vulture."

Once more the red left her cheeks and she stood before him with clinched hands.

"What does that prove? I have not told you whether I was there or not."

"But you were, eh? Come, I want it all. In a case like this nothing must be kept back."

"Then, know the truth, for I will keep nothing from you though we are as yet strangers and I know nothing of you more than that you are at the Black Bowie and that you came to Brimstone Bar when they sent—"

She stopped of her own accord and smiled.

"Never mind these things. Red Vulture? Yes, I am its exile."

"They drove you out of camp a long time ago, I believe?"

"Drove me out at the muzzles of revolvers," smiled Lady Tiger.

"And you were not come back on pain of death?"

"That was the sentence."

"Which you obeyed?"

"Of course. They thought I had given their nabob the dagger he got in his heart, but there they blundered."

"You made no defense."

"What was the use?" cried the Queen of Sheba. "They were bound to get rid of me. They called me the Female Jonah and every misfortune that befell Red Vulture they saddled upon me."

"And you were innocent of them all?"

"Yes. Queer, wasn't it? There were men in the camp who hated me. I had enemies who were determined that I should never get a dollar of their nabob's wealth. I could have become his wife, but I was true to the memory of Mark Mayfield and did not know what had become of him. I would not have touched an ounce of the money made by the Croesus of Red Vulture, and when he was killed they fell upon me and I had to go into exile."

Cool Claude, leaning back in his chair, was listening to Lady Tiger while he drank in the sudden flashings of her black eyes.

"As I have said, that banishment may stand between you and the mines of Mark Mayfield even if you should prove by the ring that you were his wife at the time of his death. You've had a checkered career, Lady Tiger."

"You are right."

"You have had some singular adventures since quitting Red Vulture."

"What, have you made it a point to follow my career?"

"I have not said so," was the reply.

"No, but you talk strangely for a man who professes to be on the hunt of Mark Mayfield's wife."

"Do I? You have been all over the Southwest since then. You were at one time the female alcalde of Leopard City."

There was a quick start, and the hand of Lady Tiger went to her waist and rested there.

"You held that place a year, when something happened and you left Leopard between two days."

A man never spoke with more coolness than the Spotter from Spottersville.

"What does all this have to do with your hunt?" she exclaimed.

"Maybe nothing; perhaps everything."

The woman drew off and seemed to grasp a mental problem.

"Without the ring I cannot reach my estate?" she suddenly cried. "I must have that bauble, eh?"

"Yes."

"I will have it. I will place it in your hands."

"But you were robbed, you don't know when. The thief may be a thousand miles from here."

"That will make no difference. I will get it back."

"Was anything else taken at the time?"

"Nothing but the ring."

"The person knew it."

"Of course; and I could, if I would, tell you of a face which I saw when I walked out of Red Vulture at the muzzles of the six-shooters. I have seen the same face here in Brimstone, but for the life of me I failed to place it till a few hours ago. If you had come to me a little sooner with your story, I would have surprised some one, but I will do it yet."

A minute afterward, Cool Claude stood at the door of Lady Tiger's room, and she was looking at him with all eyes.

"I am glad you came," said she. "I do trust you men very far, and I thought my past was a sealed book to all save myself; but you know some of it, and I must rest content."

The Man from Cinnabar went back to the Black Bowie, and found Major Hollyhock waiting for him with impatience written upon his face.

"I have seen the tigress at home," said the spotter.

"I saw you enter the house and you may imagine with what impatience I have been sitting here."

"I played the hand we had agreed upon and she betrayed herself."

"What, did she confess that she was the exile of Red Vulture?"

"She boldly avowed it."

"Ha, that convicts her of one thing—that establishes her identity."

"But wait," said the detective. "You must not forget how absolutely dangerous this fair creature is."

"I forget nothing," was the reply. "I know

that she will stoop to anything—that she has played some of the darkest and slickest hands ever played by a member of her sex. This woman is all-powerful here."

"You are right, the Black Tribunal is in her grip."

"Just so, and at the lifting of her hand, these toughs of the mountain will do anything. We are two against all of them. They have already thrown their coils around Lucy Lynx and also around her lover, young Ware. We may be too late to save either, but woe to the Black Tribunal if it has harmed a single hair of Lucy's head!" and the hand of Major Hollyhock came down upon the table with sudden emphasis.

Cool Claude smiled.

"Now that we know this woman—now that we are here with a sworn mission on our hands, with the men of Brimstone Bar against us, and at the beck and nod of this Colorado Jezebel, there must be no faltering. The funeral is over; the victim of the Palace murder sleeps in his grave on the mountain, but we have not unmasked the slayer."

"Would that be hard to do with what we already know?"

"Perhaps not. I have been warned."

"Yes, and you have returned the warning with a message of defiance. You have defied the very Tribunal which is under the thumb of this woman."

"And controlled, in a measure, by Captain Satin-Slipper, too?"

"That man is in Lady Tiger's coils. He is sleek and cool, one among a thousand. He knows not who killed Colonel Samson, for do you think she would trust him with such a secret?"

"I think she would not."

"You are right. We have to meet both of them; but you have excited her curiosity. She will see that you are not banished for a time."

"Lady Tiger will have use for me before long," laughed the detective.

"And the moment she discovers your mission, your life won't be worth that!" and the speaker snapped his fingers across the table.

Cool Claude evidently knew this from the smile with which he met the words of Major Hollyhock, and the next moment he was quietly smoking.

Meantime Lady Tiger had searched every nook behind the curtain in the corner.

There was excitement in her face and when she stopped it was at the wall before her eyes.

"There is but one way and that is to follow the yellow cat," she said. "I won't trust any one else on the trail. I can go back to my old life in the mountains for a few days." I have been there before and know how the trails run. He can't be far and I am of the opinion that her will lurk somewhere in the neighborhood and will try to track me as of yore. Who would have thought that this man—this person who came to Brimstone when Major Hollyhock sent for him—was hunting for the wife of the man who died as Mark Mayfield? I don't like his keen eye nor his accursed coolness; but I will make a tool of him before I am through with him, or into the death clutches of the Tribunal he drops never to come out of them alive! This is a cool game of mine and it must be played with all the coolness I can muster."

Half an hour later a woman, dressed in garments that did not impede her motions on the trails near Brimstone Bar, stood in the middle of a little basin looking up at the mountains that rose above her.

Lady Tiger was already on the hunt of the thief of the ring with the ruby setting, though if she had looked elsewhere, she need not have crept to the valley.

The day ended and night came once more to find the woman of Brimstone Bar some distance from camp with her back turned toward the house she called home.

The trail was clothed in a deep silence which nothing broke, and when she came out upon a spur of the mountain and, stopping, looked into the dim hollow beneath, her eyes had a glitter they had not known since her interview with Cool Claude, the detective.

All at once she turned and looked down over the winding path which lost itself in the deep shadows some distance away.

Something was moving yonder—something that seemed to have the stealth of a panther, but which now and then made a noise which enabled the woman who had been an exile from more than one tough camp to keep track of it.

At last it came in sight and halted within a few feet of her position.

Lady Tiger who had drawn a revolver leaned a step forward and eyed the figure with an evil glare.

"I have found him!" she said under her breath.

"I thought he would not go far, but would linger hereabouts. I won't parley with the yellow cat. I have him at my mercy and he has the ring on his person. I will finish all without a word."

The revolver was lifted till it covered the heart of the man standing in the trail.

The keen eye of Lady Tiger glanced along the

barrel. Scarcely ten yards separated the pair. Suddenly the mountain rung with the report of the revolver; but to the woman's horror the figure fired at did not stir.

"Merciful God, it is not human!" she cried, and the next moment was running from the spot with the weapon ready to fall from her grip.

CHAPTER XV.

A KNIFE HAS NO EYES.

CAPTAIN SATIN-SLIPPER, the Dude Desperado of Brimstone, sat in his own house all alone, and the hour was ten at night.

"Why not see for one's self?" said he. "The coast must be clear by this time, and I run no great risk, seeing that I know the way to the place. 'I have been there before, but never on a mission of this sort. I will go.'"

He opened a drawer in the little table at which he sat, threw his cigar into a box of sawdust at his feet, and got up.

He had taken from the drawer a revolver, which he concealed on his person, and thus equipped, left the house.

A little later he stood in an underground tunnel, holding in his hand a taper, which revealed the place tolerably well, and showed him the path which led down into the bowels of the earth, as it seemed.

Captain Satin-Slipper had invaded the precincts of the Black Tribunal, and stood alone in the corridor which led to the executioner's chamber.

The dread Court of Brimstone Bar had made suggestive improvements in the underground structure of the mine, which had been turned over by its owners to the needs of the Tribunal. There were corridors and doors which the hand of man had placed in every direction, and these were known to none but the members of the Court.

Captain Satin-Slipper went down the narrow way, with the torch burning steadily, for there was no wind to flicker it.

He had stolen to the mine for a purpose, and now and then looked over his shoulder, as if he feared he might have been watched, for he knew the cunning of the woman at the head of the Tribunal—the woman with whom he was said to be in love, though if he had been compelled to tell the truth, there might have been a different story.

He reached at last a door set in the wall, and taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he inserted one into the lock and opened the portal.

Instead of entering a room of some dimensions, he found himself in another corridor, down which he moved for some distance, when he came to another door of the same sort.

"I will discover something pretty soon," he said. "If what she told me was true—if the Court did carry out the sentence upon the two prisoners—I will almost feel like turning on the beautiful serpent of Brimstone Bar."

The second door opened at the workings of the key in the lock, and Captain Satin-Slipper stepped forward, with resolution written on his face.

"There's nothing here!" he exclaimed.

The room or stone chamber into which he had stepped was empty.

"They carry out the sentences of the Court here," he said, half under his breath. "This is the place to which they bring the convicted, and hither they were ordered brought by the executioners."

He moved around the room, with his taper throwing its light upon the walls, and when he reached a table which stood against the stone, he leaned across it and ran his light along the wall.

"These are the same old inscriptions. I see nothing late here. Maybe neither of them got to write a word, or they may not have discovered the names of former victims."

Captain Satin-Slipper did not quit the chamber for some time. He searched every nook and corner of it, for he was anxious to discover the fate of Lucy Lynx, the victim of the Black Tribunal.

When he passed out it was to go back to the same corridor he had traversed on his way to the death-room. The taper threw its sickly light upon the walls once more, and when he stood against a rock he suddenly crushed out the light which had helped him to the spot and listened.

"It may be one of the men," said he, while he stood in the dark. "The corridor is wide enough to let him pass, and I won't have to meet him if he keeps to the left."

There now came down the echoing tunnel the sound of footsteps, and Captain Satin-Slipper, waiting for their maker, hugged the wall with his heart in his throat, as it were.

Fortunately, he had ensconced himself in a sort of natural niche, hardly large enough to conceal him, and there he stood, scarcely breathing in the excitement of the moment.

In a few moments the sounds passed him and he knew that some one had gone by in the dark.

Leaning from his place of concealment, Captain Satin-Slipper watched for a light which

he might have thought would be struck soon, and in this he was not disappointed.

All at once a little light sprung up, and he tried to make out the figure of its holder. But the distance was so great that he did not meet with success, and he bit his lip when it moved toward him.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" cried the Dude Desperado of Brimstone Bar. "It is coming back this way, and with the light to reveal me to the bearer."

He fell back once more into the niche, and drew from beneath his coat a knife about the hilt of which he wound his long dark fingers.

Nearer and nearer came the moving figure with the light.

Captain Satin-Slipper watched it with all eyes, but still could not make out the looks of the man in the corridor.

"What, out again? Ho, a dark lantern!" he suddenly cried, as everything became wrapped in darkness. "There is but one such thing in Brimstone, and it belongs to Lady Tiger. The person yonder is not the Queen of Sheba. He may have her light, but, I think not. In heaven's name, who am I watching here?"

The light was not turned on again by its carrier, and Captain Satin-Slipper stood within the narrow confines of the little niche and waited.

At last the figure passed him in the dark again and moved on.

This time, with the desperateness of a man resolved to see the end of an adventure, come what might, he followed it.

He removed his boots and left them against the wall.

Some time elapsed before he saw the light again; this time it was moving near the ground, and when he saw it stop as though held near the foot of the wall, he drew back, with a little cry.

"It is at the spot where I once saw Lady Tiger fumbling along the stone," said he. "It was two years ago or more, and I happened to come upon her suddenly. I did not think she was in the mine at the time and almost betrayed myself when I caught sight of her. Now that person is there with his light and—"

He checked himself and got down in the dust in the path.

All of a sudden the light near the foot of the wall was thrown upward and for the first time he caught sight of the man's face.

"Great heavens!" cried Captain Satin-Slipper. "It is the Man from Cinnabar!"

Yes, he had discovered that the person he had watched so carefully was Cool Claude, the Spotter from Spottersville. What had brought him to the Court of the Black Tribunal? How had he found the trail thither, and what was this man's mission, stooping at the foot of the stone, with the dark lantern now throwing its light upon the spot?

Captain Satin-Slipper watched him with more eagerness than before.

He had sent him a notice to quit the camp—had warned him that he tarried there at the risk of his life, but he had defied the Tribunal, and now stood within its secret courts, and not as a prisoner, either.

Cool Claude did not crouch at the foot of the wall very long. If it had yielded him anything he had discovered all there was to see, and while Captain Satin-Slipper hoped to see more of his movements, he was disappointed, for all at once the light went out and darkness once more filled the place.

The sound of footsteps again assailed the captain's ears, and he listened until they began to die out in the distance.

"Here goes again," he cried, and and next moment he was on Cool Claude's track, as before.

"Gods! coming back, and the corridor isn't large enough for two!" suddenly fell from the lips of Captain Satin-Slipper, and he hugged the unyielding wall with the knife lying along his sleeve and his eyes trying to penetrate the gloom ahead.

Some one was coming back, and of course it was Cool Claude.

Captain Satin-Slipper waited with the coolness of a tiger in the jungle. He seemed to make a mental calculation of the time that would elapse before they would come together.

He was touched at last, and with the contact in the gloom he threw up his hand and seized a collar.

There was a sudden drawing back of the person seized and then a pair of hands caught hold of Captain Satin-Slipper.

"Not so fast! I can play at the same game," cried the Dude Desperado, and throwing the weight of his body forward with the quickness of an Indian, he struck twice with the knife, at each time feeling the blade sink into human flesh.

The person who was his antagonist seemed to fall back a dead weight in his grip, and when Captain Satin-Slipper let go there was a heavy fall.

"It wasn't much of a fight," said he under his breath. "I caught him right the first time as though there were eyes at the ends of my fingers. There won't be any disturbance between Major Hollyhock's friend and the Black Tribunal. I have settled that."

Captain Satin-Slipper stood for a moment longer in the middle of the corridor and regained his breath.

He knew that the victim of his knife lay at his feet dead, for not a sound came up to tell him otherwise.

Five minutes passed before he ventured to look at his foe.

"I might as well use his own light," he said to himself and stooping over the body, he began to search it for an object which he believed he had lately seen in one of the hands.

"The deuce! where is it?" cried Captain Satin-Slipper, growing impatient at last. "He had it a moment ago. I saw his face by its light. It told me that he was the man called Jack Juniper and the major's right bower; but here I can't find it at all."

It was the strangest thing in the world and though he searched the body, he did not find the lantern and was forced to give up the hunt with a curse.

"But I'm not going to be fooled just because I can't find the lantern," he said. "I have matches and they will help me to what I want."

He drew one of his own lucifers along the wall at his right and as the little flame leaped into being, he held it toward the ground.

"Great God! what is this?"

Captain Satin-Slipper had lost color and his eyes were staring at the body at his feet.

It was the body of a man in dark clothes and lay on its back with the face turned toward the stone ceiling overhead.

Once more he held his match down, the face of the dead rewarding him with a ghastly pallor which had already chased away the bloom of health.

"This is the most infernal blunder of my life," he cried. "I have killed Cyclone Kit, the High Sheriff of the Black Tribunal!"

There was no mistaking this. The man at his feet was not Cool Claude, but a totally different person.

He had killed Cyclone Kit.

"How did this man get between us?" said Captain Satin-Slipper. "I saw the other one start toward me. I waited for him here, but instead, I have killed the sheriff. Well, the secret is mine; but the Man from Cinnabar shall pay for my blunder!"

The match went out and the next moment Captain Satin-Slipper, with the strength of a giant, was dragging a human body down the lightless way.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALKALI BURT'S STORY.

Down through the dark of the underground court and prison went Captain Satin-Slipper and the man he had killed in the corridor.

"Won't I make him pay for this?" grated the Dude Desperado. "Here I have finished Cyclone Kit when I thought all the time I was killing the Man from Cinnabar. When I have hidden this body in the depths of the pit I will go back and see what Jack Juniper was looking at at the foot of the wall."

Before long Captain Satin-Slipper was leaning over the brink of a dark pit. The corpse of the High Sheriff of Brimstone lay at his feet and in a little while he dragged it forward and pushed it over the edge of the chasm.

He could not see it descending into the gloom, but he knew it went downward for many hundreds of feet and that when it should strike it would be far below him and where it would not be discovered by any one.

Captain Satin-Slipper went back relieved. He had a secret which he shared with no one. Cyclone Kit was immensely popular with the toughs of Brimstone and all knew that he belonged to the Black Tribunal, though some did not know what particular position he held in the dread Court.

The stars were looking more than usually brilliant when the Dude Desperado emerged from the depths of the mine. He had gone back to the spot where he last saw Cool Claude, but his match did not reveal much.

He could not tell why the Man from Cinnabar had searched that part of the wall and, forced to give it up, he went back and at last stood under his own roof with the secret of Cyclone Kit's death his own property.

"I wouldn't mind having No Tung with me just now," he said. "I sent the Celestial off at Lady Tiger's request and he is worth his weight in gold when he is needed. But the yellow cat could have saved the girl, Lucy Lynx, if he had opened his mouth; but somehow or other he chose to keep still and the prisoner of the Tribunal was hanged in the execution chamber."

There opened at this moment a door on the captain's right and a man who looked at him from gray eyes came forward and without invitation dropped into a chair on the opposite of the table.

This person was Alkali Burt, one of the oldest men at Brimstone Bar and a member of the Black Tribunal.

"What is it?" asked Captain Satin-Slipper, looking at this man.

"A good deal, I think. Why don't you carry out the threat?"

"What threat?"

"Why, the one ag'in the man at the Black Bowie."

No answer

"He defied us all."

"I know that; but I am not the High Sheriff of Brimstone."

"True. Whar is Cyclone?"

The sudden question brought back the tragedy in the mine and Captain Satin-Slipper felt some color quit his cheeks, but in a moment he was himself again.

"Cyclone must be somewhere. It is his duty to serve the writ that makes the arrest," he said.

"Well, it will be served, won't it?"

"It should be."

"We've got this man under our thumb. There is no escape for neither."

"Do you refer also to Major Hollyhock?"

"I do. They are birds of a feather. See here: I've been playing spy a little on my own hook and with considerable risk. You know that a window looks out over the porch of the Bowie?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've been lyin' along it listening. I keep my ears open at their widest on such occasions and to-night I heard something that astonished me."

"Go on, Alkali."

The old man who looked like a spy, with his snaky eyes that fairly glistened while he talked, ran his fingers through his long beard and bent over the table.

"Them men were pards long afore Major Hollyhock ever saw Brimstone Bar. Jack Juniper is in the major's employ and is his detective. He is helping him to clear up a mystery which seems to be connected with Colonel Samson's death. The hunt goes further back than that, though. Thar's a woman in the case and, from what I could gather, she is still livin'. You see she used to be a character in another part of the world—played with the hearts of men, and ended by running away from her husband who got a divorce soon afterward and married another woman."

"That's nothing new for a woman to do."

"Of course not; but this one may have had two or three husbands. The detective has picked up a good many points about her, and from the way he talked to Major Hollyhock, he's gettin' the case worked up to a demonstration, and if let alone, will create a sensation before long."

"Let him, Burt."

"But, hang it all, it might interfere with your plans."

"How with my plans?"

"Don't let me get too impertinent, captain. I haven't been blind to what's been goin' on in Brimstone durin' the past few months. I think I can see how far things have progressed, and if you let this cool head go on, he might spoil your plans and give you lots of trouble."

"Explain."

"I will, and won't mince matters one bit."

Once more the skeleton fingers wandered through Alkali Burt's beard, and his voice dropped to the confines of a whisper.

"If he wins, you're liable to lose a wife, captain," he went on. "I kin see that you and Lady Tiger will some day, if not disturbed, become man and wife, and the bonanza which the Silver King left behind will fall to both of you."

"How to both of us?"

"By the terms of the will."

In an instant there rushed over Captain Satin-Slipper's mind the interview with Lady Tiger in which she had announced that she had the nabob's will and that she was sole legatee.

"What, don't you know what Colonel Samson said in the last will and testament he left behind?"

"I am ignorant of it all."

"That's queer. You see—it's no secret now, since Samson's in his grave on the mountain—a short time before he was killed, he sent for me one night and I went to the Palace, slipping in accordin' to instructions without being seen. He wrote his will that night—wrote it in my presence, and I see'd it done."

"Well?"

"It was the strangest document ever written this side the Rockies. You know he had ten mines?"

"Yes, ten."

"He gave you three—they was named in the will. He gave Lady Tiger three, named like yours. Then, the last four he willed to—whom do you think, captain?"

Captain Satin-Slipper shook his head.

"He gave 'em out an' out to the girl what killed him."

"Not to Lucy Lynx?"

"To Lucy Lynx! He gave her the Chained Tiger, the Broken Ledge, the Snapshot an' the Limpin' Bonanza."

"Any two of which were worth more than all the others put together!" cried the Dude Desperado.

"That's right. Well, that's the way the will went—the one I saw him write that night. When all was done I signed it as a witness an' he said

there would be another witness, but did not tell me who. Now, if the girl's dead an' you know what the Court decreed, the whole fortune will fall to both of you."

It was a most singular revelation to Captain Satin-Slipper and for some time he sat there unable to believe what he had just heard.

"Don't you see that the mines which he gave to Lady Tiger are played-out ones, or nearly so?" he suddenly asked.

"I do, an' it seemed to me that he smiled to himself while writin' down their names."

"What became of the will?"

"He kept it, of course. But I observe that it hasn't turned up since the killin' an' I had thought of takin' a look for it."

"At the Palace?"

"Thar an' elsewhar."

"I am aware that Lady Tiger has in her possession a document which might create some excitement."

"A will?"

"A paper which she fixed up some time ago."

"Did she do it all herself?"

"The whole thing came from her hands; but don't say a word that might get me into a pickle."

"Not a word," said Captain Satin-Slipper solemnly.

Alkali Burt settled back in his chair and suddenly relapsed into silence.

"Why don't you go on?"

"I guess I'd better not. In the first place, you are goin' to marry the woman called Lady Tiger, an' I don't like to talk about your affianced."

Captain Satin-Slipper grinned.

"That is no matter, Burt. You say she wrote out a document which might create a big sensation in camp?"

"That's what. I know what I'm talkin' about, but as she's your—"

"Don't let that bother you one bit," was the interruption. "I want the truth. I want to know what this woman did, why she did it and where the document is."

The eagerness displayed by Captain Satin-Slipper rather startled Alkali Burt.

"Don't you intend ter marry her?" he cried.

"Don't let what I may do enter into this matter at all."

"It's common talk among the boys that she has tightened the coils about you so that thar's no escape."

"They regard it as one of her tricks, do they?"

"Sorter that way."

It seemed to Alkali Burt that Captain Satin-Slipper bit his lip behind his fine mustache.

"Come back to what she wrote out," he said. "Was that another will?"

The man across the little table inclined his head.

"You mean it was a false will—a forged one?"

"I—I don't want to be misquoted—"

"You won't be," broke in Captain Satin-Slipper. "I know what I am about. What did Lady Tiger do with the will she wrote?"

"Bid it."

"Do you know where?"

"At home."

"And the exact spot is known to you? You saw her hide the false will, Alkali?"

There was no reply, but for a moment the little eyes of the old man glowed.

"Alkali, I want to see that document," said Captain Satin-Slipper, leaning over the table.

"When?"

"Now."

"It would have to be brought to you without her knowledge or consent."

"It must come to me."

"Now seems to be the best time for the work. Lady Tiger is not in camp."

"Whar is she?"

"Somewhar among the mountains."

"She may have taken the will along."

"That is true, but the chances ar' that it is still whar I saw her put it."

"Bring it to me, Burt. I don't say that I will keep it, but I want to see how cunning this woman is."

"She's a slick one, captain, and when you're man an' wife she'll keep you hustling to keep up with her tricks."

Alkali Burt ended his words with a laugh and looked at his master.

When he stood erect, still looking into Captain Satin-Slipper's face, he went on:

"Don't forget this man who is with Major Hollyhock. He must be struck at once. He is a mountain detective—a man-tracker and if you let him play out his game, not only will you never become the husband of Lady Tiger, but something else may happen more startlin' still."

"What do you mean?"

Alkali Burt shook his head.

"Not now, captain," he said. "I heard a good deal lyin' on the roof of the Black Bowie. This man is as cool as a cucumber; you mustn't attempt to awe him, you can't do that. You must hit him hard and there must be but one blow."

This was exactly what Captain Satin-Slipper thought.

"When I strike this Man from Cinnabar, there will be but one blow," he said.

Alkali Burt went to the door and looked back.

"If the girl should turn up, don't you see that it would knock the scheme all in the head? There may be a later will, I mean a later one than the one I saw him write—the one Lady Tiger has is a false document—and it may give her, Lucy Lynx, everything."

"Why should he?"

"I don't know, but I could see the night he made the will he was in favor of the waif; he said to me that he wasn't givin' her enough, an' that mebbe he'd reverse the thing and gave her all."

"He said that, did he?"

"Yes."

Captain Satin-Slipper drummed on the table a moment.

"I'd like to see that will—the one you signed," he said, looking at Burt.

"I'd get it for you, but for one thing."

"What's that?"

"I believe Lady Tiger burnt it the night she wrote the other one."

An oath fell from Captain Satin-Slipper's tongue.

"Yet, you're goin' to marry her, captain," and with a laugh Alkali Burt went out.

CHAPTER XVII.

PLAYING HIGH SHERIFF.

If Captain Satin-Slipper had thought before that Cool Claude's presence in Brimstone Bar meant ruin to any schemes of his, he was more than ever convinced of it now.

The scene witnessed by Alkali Burt from the roof of the porch that ran along the front of the Black Bowie was more than enough to set every doubt at rest.

"A sure blow with a heavy hand," he said to himself when the figure of the old man had disappeared. "I won't give him time to carry out the plan which he and Major Hollyhock have hatched out. The Tribunal is back of me and that ought to be enough. Why not take in the other one at the same time? Major Hollyhock is dangerous, too. I have long believed that he was here for a purpose, and I am convinced from what I have discovered that that is not his name. Samson, the Silver King, used to look at him with singular curiosity, and once or twice I saw him follow the Major some distance."

Captain Satin-Slipper spent some time writing at the table, and when he had finished he sealed what he had written and fastened it with wax. It looked like an official document, and thrusting it in his bosom, he left the house and bent his steps toward the Black Bowie.

He had written no less a document than the forced exilement of the two friends at the hotel. He had signed it with the pen used to sign all important documents promulgated by the Black Tribunal, and as the High Sheriff of that Court was no more, he may have intended to serve the papers himself.

He looked up at the window over the porch and saw a light there, but a curtain had been let down and he could see nothing beyond the sill.

Captain Satin-Slipper turned toward the hotel, crossed the porch and encountered the burly landlord at the door.

In reply to his inquiry he was told that no one was in the upper room at the time but Major Hollyhock.

"Why not?" thought the Dude Desperado. "Why not go up and 'pump' the man overhead and play a soft but deadly hand before his pard comes back?"

He turned toward the door, watched by the landlord, and unmolested began to climb the stairs.

In a minute he was knocking at Major Hollyhock's door and a warm "come in" greeted his ears.

It might be that Major Hollyhock was surprised to see enter his room at that hour the man who did so; but he betrayed no astonishment, and courteously waved his visitor to a chair.

There was a good deal of difference between the two men, one rather rough, the other as dandyfied and oily as man could be, and Captain Satin-Slipper in leaning back in his chair, took care to see that his coat would not suffer.

"You don't come to see me often!" said Major Hollyhock.

"No. The fact is, I don't visit much. Too much to do, you know, and, besides, we've met at the tables."

"Of course, but I don't just like such acquaintance."

"Because it is but a gambler's friendship, eh?"

"Perhaps."

Captain Satin-Slipper seemed to pull his fingers.

"When I visit, it's generally on business," he said. "I am rather sorry that I've called on you, major, but the fact is, we have to protect ourselves."

"Of course. No one blames you for that."

The Dude Desperado of Brimstone looked nonplused. Major Hollyhock was speaking with the coolness of Cool Claude himself.

"I have here a paper which perhaps you and your friend should read conjointly."

At the same time Captain Satin-Slipper pulled the document from his bosom and laid it on the table.

In an instant the major's hand reached out and took it up.

"It seems to be official." He looked into Captain Satin-Slipper's eye.

"You might call it so."

"Then, as I'm a party interested, I will just see what it contains," and he broke the seal so suddenly that Captain Satin-Slipper started.

"Maybe it would be best to let it remain sealed till he comes back."

"I don't think so."

The next moment Major Hollyhock was reading the paper on which the ink was hardly dry. He was watched intently by the man at his elbow, and Captain Satin-Slipper was wondering what would be his first exclamation.

Major Hollyhock displayed no emotion as his eye went down the sheet.

He smiled when he reached the last line, and then seeming to study the signature, he slowly looked up.

"Are you the High Sheriff of the Court?" asked Major Hollyhock.

Captain Satin-Slipper appeared to choke, but only for a moment.

"I am not!"

"Who is?"

"Really—"

"Don't stammer, my dear captain," broke in Major Hollyhock, laying one of his hands softly on the captain's knee. "Let me tell you that Cyclone Kit is the High Sheriff of the Black Tribunal, or was last night."

"Then, he is yet."

"Unless he has resigned, or is dead."

There seemed a terrible significance in the last words uttered by the man before him.

Captain Satin-Slipper would almost have sworn at that moment that his dread secret had a sharer.

"We have fallen under the displeasure of the Tribunal," he went on. "We are virtually banished from Brimstone Bar. Why?"

There was no reply.

"You don't speak, captain. Don't you know?"

"The Court deems your presence here a perpetual menace," he said at last.

"What, two men menace the peace of fifty?" cried Major Hollyhock.

"You have the document of the Court before you."

"In your handwriting, captain?"

Captain Satin-Slipper would have stuttered if he had been compelled to speak at that moment.

"I'll waive that. I care not who wrote this order of exile," continued Major Hollyhock. "I am here because I have a right to be. Of all living men, I have a right to be where I am—in the heart of Brimstone Bar."

He was looking squarely at the man in the opposite chair.

"You refuse to go, then?"

"Speaking for myself, I refuse and—"

The door opened at that very moment and there stood on the threshold the handsome figure of Cool Claude, looking at Captain Satin-Slipper to whom he had just bowed.

"You are just in time. Here is a double one," said Major Hollyhock, handing the document toward the detective from Cinnabar.

The soft fingers of Cool Claude took the paper and Captain Satin-Slipper watched him.

"I have already answered one threat," said he, looking over the top of the paper into the captain's face.

The Dude Desperado arose and stood erect.

"We don't want war."

"There will be none unless you make it."

"I am a man of peace. I merely serve the papers issued by the Court of Brimstone and—"

"Isn't this work generally done by your High Sheriff?"

"Yes."

"Why don't he do it? He served the first paper, didn't he?"

"Cyclone Kit did."

"But this time you have come yourself."

Captain Satin-Slipper looked and did not speak.

He was at the door when all at once Cool Claude stood across the little room and caught his arm.

"Don't be in a hurry," he said, and the following moment he had led the captain back to the chair and seated him. "You might have sent this notice by your Celestial, No Tung. A yellow puzzle that. But since you have done us the honor to bring it in person, we ought to thank you."

There was a clever bit of sarcasm in Cool Claude's words, and Captain Satin-Slipper, held by his eye, could only look into his face and stammer.

"We seek no quarrel. We are here because we are in the service of eternal justice. Go back to the Court of your own making; return to the Black Tribunal and say to it that the last

victims it has selected refuse to obey the command of exilement and that we shall remain to the last. The vultures may soar above the mountain, but they never see the bodies of the Black Court's prey. You have a way of hiding deep beneath the gold hills the forms of the victims of your Court. Is it customary to make your High Sheriff guard their bones where you have left them to decay?"

Captain Satin-Slipper fell back in his chair with a light cry, but Cool Claude went on:

"Don't misunderstand me, captain. I am fighting a double battle and you know something about it. I want no quarrel with men who are the slaves of a Tribunal founded on guilt and demonism. But don't let me detain you longer. Since you are acting as High Sheriff in place of Cyclone Kit, who is detained elsewhere, you may have other work that demands your time."

Captain Satin-Slipper, freed from the hand of Cool Claude, arose and crossed the room.

There was a deep and devilish glitter in his eye.

"You have thrown down the glove," he said, looking at Cool Claude. "You can't remain here. I will take your message to the Tribunal. It will as surely try you as it will convict. None have ever escaped its death-grip!"

"Not even the innocent girl who was thrown to the lions the other day!"

"If you mean Lucy Lynx, not even her. The Court is no respecter of persons. The guilty suffer, no matter what is their standing. Gentlemen, you have delayed your going too long. You are at this moment in the iron grip of the Black Tribunal of Brimstone Bar!"

The door was opened by the effeminate hand of Captain Satin-Slipper; he put one foot outside and at that moment caught the cool eye of the Spotter from Spottersville.

"In the grip of the Black Court, are we?" said Claude the Cool. "Since you left the underground court the last time, in whose grip is your soul? And, by the way, what would Brimstone say if it knew what detains where few men breathe the High Sheriff of its august Court?"

Captain Satin-Slipper seemed to stagger.

This direct allusion to the killing of Cyclone Kit—it could be nothing less—went through him like an arrow.

He gave the two friends another look and sprung down the stairs.

From the foot of the flight he looked up and for a moment stood there with clinched hands.

"Rats in a trap!" he hissed. "I will make this the last night they shall see. I may have little hands and wear kids, but I am death to men like those up there. As for that one—the Man from Cinnabar—he knows too much and must die for that knowledge. The Black Tribunal has never failed to convict and kill!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

LUCY LYNX ONCE MORE.

"YOU know that man now."

"Better than ever before, but I had a good insight to him previous to this visit. He is playing for high stakes."

"He is one of the sleekest tigers of his kind unchained. The man who takes Captain Satin-Slipper for a fool or coward because of his little hands and his kids, will find himself terribly mistaken. You remember what I told you of my adventure in the underground court?"

"Yes."

Major Hollyhock smiled.

"He will carry out the threat of the Tribunal as referred to in no mistakable language, in that paper," he went on.

"Certainly," and Cool Claude picked up the document of exilement. "This came from the hands of Captain Satin-Slipper. He wrote this and delivered it in person. Why? Because his high sheriff, Cyclone Kit, is not on duty. He will never again serve the Black Tribunal."

"What has become of Lady Tiger?" asked the major.

"She will show her stripes when she is needed."

Captain Satin-Slipper had been gone ten minutes when there was a stir in the bar-room below, and Cool Claude, going to the door, held it open and listened.

If he could have looked into the drinking-room of the Black Bowie at that moment, he would have seen ten stalwart men file into the place.

Resolution was stamped on each bronzed face, and taking their place along the rough counter, they drank and stood like posts.

That these men belonged to the Black Tribunal of Brimstone Bar there was no doubt, and when they had stood there a moment, one glanced at the door leading to the steps, and said:

"Gentlemen, the time has come. Forward!"

All ten moved at once. They went to the door, and their leader threw it open.

"Don't do it here," said the landlord, looking over the counter.

"We don't intend to, Bill. We are here to take them off."

A moment later the foot of the captain of the men of the Tribunal struck the stair.

He looked up and seemed to see something at the top of the flight.

Against the door stood a human form, tall and statue-like, in one hand a revolver, and on the face a look of quiet daring.

Cool Claude looked down at the men crowded into the little space at the foot of the steps, and waited for the advance.

He knew that the toughs of Brimstone Bar had come to take him to the merciless Court of the Tribunal.

The captain of the ten came on.

"Halt!"

At the sound of the voice the toughs on the steps seemed to fall back, and their leader stopped on the fourth step.

All looked up and saw in the dim light the figure of Cool Claude and behind it a glimpse of Major Hollyhock in the light of the lamp burning against the wall.

"Will you come down without further ceremony?" asked the captain of the ten.

"We will not come down," was the reply.

"You have received the order?"

"It is lying on the table behind me."

"You've had time for reflection."

"Time enough."

There was a short pause after these words.

"You can't fight all Brimstone."

"We don't want to fight any one."

"You can't beat the Black Tribunal."

"We have not said we could."

"Don't you intend to surrender?"

"For trial?"

"For trial."

"No!"

Cool Claude saw the captain of the ten look over his broad shoulders at the men who backed him up.

"We have come to take you to the bar of the Court," he said, when he again looked at the figure of the Man from Cinnabar. "The coils of the Tribunal are around both of you."

"What's the charge?"

"That will be read in Court," was the reply.

"We have nothing to do with it here."

Seconds were flitting and the men at the bottom of the stairs were losing patience. Besides, they did not like to be faced by a man as cool as the detective from the North. The cocked revolver in his hand was a constant menace.

"For the last time, will you come with us?" he asked.

"We don't acknowledge your authority. We have committed no crime and the Black Tribunal boasts that it punishes none but the guilty."

The figure of the captain of the ten was seen to fall back to his companions and the next moment the report of a pistol was heard.

The bullet whizzing past Cool Claude's head, buried itself in the half-open door behind him, but the cool-head himself did not move.

Major Hollyhock sprang to the step and looked down at the huddled desperadoes at the foot of the flight.

"Ready!" said the voice of Cool Claude.

In an instant two revolvers were covering the crowd of toughs and the friends were leaning forward, determination in their eyes.

"You can have anything you want if you insist upon it," said the Spotter from Spottersville. "The man who moves without our leave will drop dead against his pards. This can be war to the knife even here at Brimstone Bar. You are dealing with no innocent girls now. Lucy Lynx is not here to fall again into your merciless clutches. She is not at your disposal now."

The desperadoes stood still.

"Where is your High Sheriff?" continued Cool Claude.

There was no answer.

"Why don't you go down into the darkest recesses of your Court and look for Cyclone Kit? Seek the deep pit where you bury the victims of the Tribunal and drag to light the body of your High Sheriff. As your boast is that you punish the guilty alone, go and do so."

"What's that?" and the captain of the ten started forward. "What war you sayin' about Cyclone bein' in the deep pit?"

"Go and search it for my answer."

"How do you know he is thar?"

"Never mind that. We will be here when you come back. We won't run from the Court of the Black Tribunal."

The tall fellow ahead of the ten turned and looked into the faces by which he was surrounded.

"Who killed Cyclone?" he asked at last.

"I haven't yet said he was dead."

"But none but dead people inhabit the deep pit."

"You will find your High Sheriff there."

Indecision seemed to stand before the dark-faced posse.

"To the pit first!" said one. "Let's see what there is in this man's charge. Cyclone should be here."

The door behind the ten was opened and the leader, pausing ere he turned back toward the bar-room, looked up once more at Cool Claude.

"We will come back," he said. "We are go-

ing to investigate your charge. You will be watched all the time we are gone and if you attempt to escape you will never get far."

"We will be here when you return," was the answer. "Go and find your High Sheriff."

"Tramp, tramp through the bar-room went the ten men of the Black Court and Cool Claude turned to Major Hollyhock with a smile.

"It is more than a breathing-spell. It is an advantage. They will discover in the deep pit the corpse of Cyclone Kit, loved more than Captain Satin-Slipper. There will be a turning of the tables and the man who holds the cards now may find himself in the toils of the very Tribunal he has manipulated so long."

Major Hollyhock went to the window and saw a dark line moving across the Plaza.

"What do you think now?"

The voice of Cool Claude seemed to call him back to the present.

"I think we are in for something that will try us both," was the reply. "If the secret of Lucy Lynx is safe—"

"It is so long as they keep out of the Palace. They don't go into the house where Colonel Samson was killed. They regard it as a house of shadows and ghosts. The secret is safe there."

"I hope so. And the girl?"

"She still holds her tongue, but the time is near at hand when it will wag."

The major took a stride across the room, and halting at the table, threw upon it a package which at once caught the eye of Cool Claude.

"Must Lucy see that?" he asked.

"Yes. I have written it for her."

The Man from Cinnabar placed the packet in his bosom, and buttoned his coat over it.

Five minutes later he was moving across the Square, but in the shadows that prevailed, and taking good care that he was not watched, proceeded to the vicinity of the Palace, where he vanished among the trees in the rear of the house.

It was not the first time, as the reader will recollect, that the cool head from Cinnabar had passed the threshold of the Silver King's mansion, and once more he found himself beneath its roof.

Cool Claude had come to the Palace for a purpose, for he crept up the stairs, in a certain part of the building, and opened a door, after which he touched a button in the wall, and saw another door swing open, revealing a dark room.

The detective entered this last place and closed the door behind him.

In an instant he was confronted by a female figure, just visible in the dim light that had been turned on, and bending eagerly forward, he looked down into the eyes of Lucy Lynx!

It was as if the girl whom we saw last in the grip of the Black Tribunal had risen from the dead.

She faced the detective from Cinnabar with a white face and compressed lips. Her hands held one of his, and she spoke not while she gazed into his eyes, her lithe figure trembling as if from excitement and fear.

"What are they doing?" she said, at length. "Are they looking for me? Do they think me dead, or have they discovered—"

"That you are out of the toils, and alive?" broke in Cool Claude. "I know they suspect nothing as yet. They believe you still an inmate of the little room off the execution-chamber. The Black Tribunal is baffled, inasmuch as it has been robbed of a victim."

Lucy Lynx drew back, and for a full minute looked into the face of Cool Claude.

She saw the hand of the man before her take from his bosom a packet, which he extended.

"Is it for me?"

"It is, Lucy."

"From whom?" asked the girl, as she took it and eyed it curiously.

"It may speak for itself."

She withdrew, and leaning over the table where the lamp stood, began to open the packet.

Cool Claude watched her with interest, and noted how her hands shook as she untied the strings.

Lucy Lynx reached the writing in the letter and began to read.

All at once she paused, and looking up caught the cool-head's eye.

"I can't get through with this," she said.

"Why not?"

"It takes my breath and destroys my nerve."

Cool Claude took a step forward.

"No, it is not for you to read," she cried, holding the document as far from him as she could.

"My God! why was I ever ushered into this world?"

Clutching the paper, her head fell forward, and the next moment she seemed to have fallen in a faint over the edge of the table.

Cool Claude put one hand upon her shoulder, and that instant she started up and springing to her feet, cried out:

"Take me back to the Black Tribunal! Throw me once more into the clutches of that merciless Order. I will be expected to tell my secret even if I finally escape it. This letter tells me as much. Who is the man who had posed as Major Hollyhock? You are Cool Claude, and you know what brought him to Brimstone Bar. I

thank you for saving my life. You rescued me from the Black Court; I am still living Lucy Lynx, a waif. I am still the keeper of the secret of the night when the Silver King of Brimstone died. For God's sake, Claude the Cool, take me back to the Tribunal and let it make sure of its work!"

There was no reply; the Spotter from Spottersville looked at the girl with pity in the depths of his eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

SLIPPING back through the shades of night from a fruitless mission to the mountains came the beautiful woman of Brimstone Bar, Lady Tiger.

She had encountered among the hills a figure supposed to be the living embodiment of No Tung, the banished Mongolian, and had fired at it at point-blank range, only to see it standing in the trail after the shot, as if it was a specter and not a thing of flesh and blood.

She had fled from the apparition with the foolish shot echoing in her ears and with the fear of it at her heels. To go back to Brimstone Bar with her failure deep in her heart was now her only alternative, and while Cool Claude was gazing at Lucy Lynx, who had buried herself in the Palace haunted by the ghost of Samson, the Silver King, she crossed the silent threshold of her old home and threw herself into her favorite chair.

At home once more!

Lady Tiger, looking pale and much older than when she started out to find No Tung, the supposed robber of the ring with the ruby setting, sat for some time in the room filled with shadows, for she struck no light.

Without everything was still. She may have wondered what had taken place during her absence. What had followed the trial of Lucy Lynx, and Willis Ware, the young prospector who had followed her into the coils of the Tribunal?

All at once Lady Tiger started and sprung from the chair.

She was not the sole tenant of the little house!

In the adjoining room some one was creeping back and forth, and she thought she could distinguish the steps of a man.

Presently there fell upon the carpet a streak of light which came into the room through the crack at the bottom of the door.

The Queen of Sheba fell back and drew from the folds of her close-fitting garment a silver-mounted revolver.

She stood in the shadows of the apartment and waited with the mien of the animal after which she was named.

Who was in the other room and what had brought him to the house?

Suddenly there came to her ears the click of a latch.

The door was about to open.

She lifted the pistol slowly and waited.

At last the door moved and she saw, first the light carried by the hunter, then the face of the man himself.

"Alkali Burt!" she said to herself, watching the tall figure of the old man who crossed the threshold and set the light on the table.

As motionless as a statue stood the Queen of Sheba in the middle of the room, looking at the invader over the barrel of the six-shooter.

"I guess I war right when I told him she had burnt it," said Burt in tones that reached Lady Tiger's ear. "When she had written a will to suit herself of course she wouldn't want the genuine one around, and so she put it out of the way. I'll go back and report."

At this moment the figure of the woman of Brimstone Bar was seen to move.

She glided across the floor until she could have touched the man at the table, and all at once Alkali Burt became aware that he was not the sole occupant of the chamber.

"Heavens! the Sataness herself!" cried the old man, who, falling back, discovered that he was looking into the muzzle of a revolver held in a firm hand and uncomfortably close to his head.

"Stand where you are!" issued from Lady Tiger's mouth.

"That's just what I'm doin'."

Alkali Burt read the look by which he was met, but couldn't take his eye from the menacing pistol, as if it fascinated him.

"You were looking for something!" said the beauty of the camp.

"I was. I don't see what good a lie would do me just now."

"It will scatter your brains over the carpet."

Alkali Burt thought so, too.

"Whose work are you doing here?"

He thought instantly of the relations between Captain Satin-Slipper and the woman by whom he was confronted. They were looked upon as lovers, and it was an open secret at Brimstone Bar that, in time, they would become man and wife.

What, tell Lady Tiger that the Dude Desperado had engaged him to rob her?—that her own lover was prying into her secrets and was

seeking to deprive her of a document which, if found, might break the spell which her beauty and arts had thrown around him?

"The truth or death, Alkali Burt," said she. "I am no respecter of persons."

"Like death, eh?"

"Exactly."

Alkali Burt thought rapidly. He had been Captain Satin-Slipper's friend for years; had saved his life and had sworn eternal fidelity to the man in kids. But his own life was in the scales and he ought to look first to his own safety.

"Well, if you must know and can stand the solid truth, though it makes a traitor of me, Captain Satin-Slipper sent me."

"Captain Satin-Slipper?" repeated Lady Tiger, and Alkali Burt thought he detected a smile at the corners of her mouth. "And what were you to find here?"

"A paper."

"Ah, one wanted by him, no doubt?"

"Yes."

"You have searched the house to find it not, Alkali Burt?"

"I haven't it, as you see," and the old man threw open his jacket, exposing his inner pockets which contained nothing.

"How came you to know there was ever such a paper in this house?"

"I—I saw you write it."

Lady Tiger started.

"So you have watched me, like your yellow brother," she cried. "You have played spy when I thought I was safe in my own house. Does he want that document?"

"He wants it."

Alkali Burt was getting cooler and felt more at his ease. He thought that Lady Tiger was as powerful at Brimstone Bar as the man he had served so long, and that he might change masters with no harm to his future prospects.

"That is all," said the woman. "You have discovered nothing. I will not be hunted by a spy. The door is yonder."

The old man looked first at the woman and then at the door. He could not believe for a moment that he had been dismissed.

"You need not go and tell him that your mission has failed, nor even that I have come back," she went on. "You can go back to your old work if you want to, but it may be dangerous, for I know."

He did not move, but stood in front of her and gazed into the calm black eyes that seemed to look him through.

"Where is he?" suddenly asked Lady Tiger.

"At home."

"Alone?"

"I think so."

Her hand was lifted till it covered the door, and without a word, Alkali Burt turned and walked away.

"I'm lucky to get off this easy," said he to himself. "I expected to be shot down like a dog the moment she spied me, but when she began to question me I thought there was a chance. She didn't seem to take Captain Satin-Slipper's defection much to heart. Maybe she don't think so much of him after all. She compared me to the Chinaman who has been tracking her; but I'm better than No Tung."

He went out, and bending his steps toward Captain Satin-Slipper's abode, approached to within a few yards of it when he suddenly halted and fell back.

"I won't do it. I haven't the nerve to tell him that she turned up and made me betray him. Let him find it out for himself. From the way she looked while she talked, she's likely to tell him herself. I'll let her do it."

Alkali Burt went back and disappeared.

In a little while there came down the steps in front of Lady Tiger's house a figure that was grace itself.

It bent its steps toward Captain Satin-Slipper's abode, and instead of turning back at the fatal moment as Alkali Burt had done, it kept on until the door was reached.

There one of the hands tried the knob and the portal yielded.

In walked the Queen of Sheba, stepping along the floor like a cat on the creep until she came to a door at which she stopped and listened.

There was a light beyond and she knew that she stood at the threshold of Captain Satin-Slipper's favorite room.

Slowly she opened the door and looked into the chamber. She saw a man at a table writing, and so deeply absorbed in his task that she had not been heard.

Captain Satin-Slipper was alone. The light fell upon his handsome form as it bent over the board, and the hand that traced letters on the sheet before him looked as soft as a lady's, but it was dangerous to all his foes.

The Queen of Sheba did not move forward for a long minute. She remained at the door gazing at Captain Satin-Slipper, as if making up her mind how to proceed; but she had done this already, and was only studying him in the light of his lamp.

She entered the room and moved toward the table. He kept on at his work.

"Is that your will?"

The pen made a blotch on the sheet, and Cap-

tain Satin-Slipper looked up with a sudden start.

Color left his face when he found himself confronted by the woman believed to be somewhere in the mountains on a secret mission of her own. Their eyes met and for a little while it was look and look.

"You have not answered me," said Lady Tiger. "I asked if that was your will."

Her eyes fell upon the paper as she spoke.

"It is not," said Captain Satin-Slipper.

"But it is something important for I see you have the seal of the Tribunal at your elbow. I have just come from an interview with Alkali Burt."

The man in kids was seen to recoil, but he did not take his eyes from the orbs above him.

"You heard me? I have just had an interview with the man you sent to rob me. I found him at work, but he had discovered nothing. Captain, you played friend in a singular way. Didn't I tell you that by the terms of Samson's last will, I am the sole legatee?"

He did not reply.

"The only will that exists is in my keeping," she went on. "I am named therein sole heir. I need not divide with any one, yet you sent Alkali Burt to my house to find that document. By this act I have found you out. Captain Satin-Slipper, this night your life at Brimstone Bar comes to an end."

He made a move as if he would leap to his feet, but the hand of Lady Tiger covered him, her fingers almost touching his face.

"Take away everything you want. I give you an hour to become the lone exile of Brimstone Bar."

The words seemed to render him speechless. This was the woman whom he had promised to marry!

CHAPTER XX.

A RAY OF HOPE AMID DARKNESS.

"YOU have heard me," continued the Queen of Sheba, breaking the silence that had followed her last word. "From this moment you are the exile of the Bar. Good-night!"

Captain Satin-Slipper appeared to have been rendered dumb by the startling language of the woman who looked down upon him without a particle of pity in her beautiful eyes.

Lady Tiger, with a last look, turned away and was at the door before he caught his breath.

"One moment before you go," he said, detaining her with a motion of the hand. "I have listened to you and now you must hear me."

"Go on!"

"If, as you say, you have found me out, what shall I say of you? Who stands responsible for the fate of the girl who has suffered for the crime of another? Woman, you have played a cool hand for a big fortune; you have drawn around you a circle of human thugs and the wonder is that I have been permitted to share in these councils. But for some time I have been virtually disfranchised in Brimstone Bar. I have found spies at my heels, and despite the cleverness of the man who, dog-like, slept at my door—I banished him at your beck—I have been watched at your command. You send me adrift, do you? What if I should stay and fight? What if the man you call Captain Satin-Slipper should conclude to take his chances with the men of Brimstone Bar and face you here?"

"It has been said that I love you. I have heard whispers of this from the bearded lips of the men by whom we are surrounded. Lady Tiger—woman of two names, at least, and of a score of crimes—do you think for a moment that I would unite my fortunes with yours by the holy bonds of matrimony? I have been a rough man; I have had stains on the name I bear, and you know that I have no particular right to the one by which I am known now; but sooner than be known as your husband, I would take from you drawer the weapon kept there for my foes, and scatter the brains of Captain Satin-Slipper over the carpet at your feet!"

Her proud lips curled, and a light, derisive laugh was heard.

Still, it was easily seen that the Dude Desperado's words stung like the tail of a serpent.

"Is that all?" coolly asked the Queen of Sheba.

"Not quite. Do you hope to win the game you have played?" he went on. "Can't you see that you are in the shadow of a hand which, when it closes, will have you in its grip? Recall that night when the dagger entered Colonel Samson's house—when, all alone, the Silver King of Brimstone met the destroyer, and when a lie fastened the hideous crime upon one who was thrown to the Black Tribunal, and died as innocent of it as the babe unborn."

"Who sat on the bench and passed sentence on the waif of the Bar? Who saw Lucy Lynx led to execution and refused to lift his hand to save her?"

"I did that," said Captain Satin-Slipper, with an effort. "Who wove the coil of death about her?"

There was no reply.

"I am glad to quit this accursed place," he resumed. "I will become an exile, but not at the

muzzles of fifty revolvers and a flock of vultures overhead. I go from the polluted precincts of Brimstone Bar, but there may come a time when the hand you send forth into exile may return the compliment with compound interest."

He smiled as he finished, and seeing her watching him with a gleam of triumph in her eyes, touched his hat to her as she withdrew.

The door shut behind Lady Tiger with a bang. Captain Satin-Slipper sprung up and for a moment seemed on the eve of rushing after her, but, instead, fell back in his chair and gazed at the door.

"At last! It was bound to come to this. The spell, if it ever existed, is broken, and I am freed from the meshes of that fair enchantress. Alkali Burt played a poor hand, but then he thought she was not at the house. What will she do if I remain? She has the Court in her hand. It only tolerated me because of her. I have known this for months. I was made Judge with her consent. Without it I could never have passed into the underground court of the Black Tribunal. It would as soon condemn me as any other person. The two men at the Black Bowie would form an alliance with me, but I will not ask them. The riches of the Silver King will prove fatal to the person who finally inherits them. I will seek other fields. I can find No Tung in the mountains and we can become noted people beyond the power of Lady Tiger and the Banded Brood. This is better than I deserve. They know nothing of the deed in the mine, and they will wonder what became of the High Sheriff of the Bar. I will gather around me some spirits as cool as those who serve her, and if she ever attempts to follow me up, there will be a conflict which will tell her that the man in kids is as dangerous as the lady with the dagger."

All the time he was doing something. He took something from the various drawers and secret places about the room. He packed a small brown leather valise which had seen service elsewhere and was ready for departure before the allotted hour was up.

Captain Satin-Slipper took a last survey of the little room and stood as if undecided for a time near the table.

After all he was loth to go. To quit Brimstone Bar would be to desert several mines which were yielding very well, but which, in time, would grow into veritable bonanzas. All these he would forfeit the moment he crossed the boundary line and he could only recover them by conquest.

All this passed through his mind while he stood taking the final survey of the chamber.

"Fight it out! fight it out!" said a small still voice and the captain hesitated.

"Go, go at once!" said safety.

He went to the door at last, the valise in his hand, and looked out.

The night was cool and beautiful. The winds from the mountain blew across his cheek and dallied with the long raven hairs of his handsome mustache.

He hated to go forth into the world a woman's exile. Though he had soft hands and dressed like a dandy, there was about him a certain pride which overcame much.

He was about to step from the house and leave it behind when he caught a sound of voices and the next moment a dark line moved toward him across the Plaza.

"The men of Brimstone! the members of the Tribunal and all her slaves now," he thought.

Nearer and nearer they came.

Captain Satin-Slipper drew back, hiding his figure in the doorway and watched the moving line.

He soon made out the stalwart forms of the toughs of Brimstone and counted them all. There were just thirty.

They came on until they were within the shadow of the house.

The valise seemed to fall from his grasp and he retreated to the room he had just left. Had Lady Tiger sent the men to escort him across the dead-line?

In the room which was dimly lighted by a singly lamp Captain Satin-Slipper waited for the men of the Tribunal.

Presently a footstep fell upon the step at the door and the portal itself was opened.

He watched the door leading into the room as he had never watched it before.

As it swung open, and he caught sight of a man who had carried out his commands a hundred times, he essayed a smile, but there was no response.

The Banded Brood was against him now.

The man, who was tall and dark of face, so dark that he was known as Injun Ike, took a step forward.

In the middle of the room he halted, and transfixed Captain Satin-Slipper with his eagle eye.

"Ar' you ready, captain?" he asked.

"Ready for what?"

"To go with us."

"Whither?"

"To the Court!"

There was a start despite the affected coolness of the dandy tough, and his figure seemed to draw back, though, as a figure, it did not recoil.

"What is the matter, now?" he asked.

"You ought to know," said Injun Ike. "We have made a discovery, and, then, you know the code of the Tribunal: 'The guilty shall not escape.'"

Captain Satin-Slipper laughed.

"But a man can't be sentenced twice," cried he. "You can't pass a second sentence on me this night. I am already exiled. Injun Ike, you have come too late. The code is all right, but I am no longer a citizen of Brimstone. She has been here!"

Injun Ike hardly knew how to take these words. He leaned toward Captain Satin-Slipper and looked him in the face.

"But this is a greater charge, captain," said he. "We didn't know you had been banished, but here is something for the Tribunal to look into. We have come from the mine. We have looked down into the deep pit. More than that, we have brought with us the corpse of Cyclone Kit, the High Sheriff of the Black Tribunal!"

A shade of sudden pallor overspread Captain Satin-Slipper's face.

This was what he had dreaded and from which he was about to fly.

The companions of the man he had killed in the dark, thinking he was driving the steel to the heart of Claude the Cool, had come for him. Injun Ike was right; this was the greater crime, and he would have to answer for the killing of the High Sheriff of the Black Court.

"The boys ar' waitin', captain," continued the man in the room. "They ar' out thar, waitin' for us."

The Dude Desperado bit his nether lip almost through. His death would be Lady Tiger's triumph. This thought gave him sudden nerve.

"Come! Where are they?" he said, so suddenly that Injun Ike fell back.

"Out yonder."

Captain Satin-Slipper sprung to the door.

"I have a cool card to play which she does not think of," he said, under his breath. "I know something of that creature's past. She shall hear her pedigree read by one who knows more of it than she dreams of. I wear kids, but beneath them I carry a set of claws."

He walked to the door with the tall figure of Injun Ike at his side. The moment he appeared a lot of men gathered round him and he found himself in the midst of the terrible Court over whose deliberations he had more than once presided.

"Forward!" said Injun Ike. "No talkin' to the prisoner."

Captain Satin-Slipper was marched off without being disarmed, and the looks he received told him that there would be shown no mercy to the man who had taken the life of Cyclone Kit.

The lamps of the several gambling-dens on the Plaza threw a quantity of light upon that portion of Brimstone Bar, and when the captain and his escort reached it, a figure glided off to one side and vanished where the shadows were.

No one seemed to see it, but the searching eye of the prisoner of the Black Court had not let it escape.

The handsome tough of the mountain felt a thrill at sight of the flitting object. There was but one of its kind in his imagination and it was a host in itself.

"I'm not dead while that little man can run like that," passed through Captain Satin-Slipper's brain. "No Tung, the Silent, has come back and has taken in the situation."

CHAPTER XXI.

LADY TIGER'S TRIGGER.

The march across the Plaza was of brief duration.

The captain's dark-faced escort took him down among the shadows of the mine and he stood at last in the same chamber where he had presided over the stern deliberations of the Black Tribunal.

Instead of being its judge he was now its prisoner and knew that if the terrible charge against him was proven he would hear the same sentence he had passed upon others.

But who was the witness against him? How had the Banded Brood discovered that a crime had been committed? Who told them that in the heart of the deep pit lay the stabbed corpse of the High Sheriff of Brimstone Bar?

Left to himself for a time in the recesses of the Black Court, Captain Satin-Slipper recalled everything calculated to prejudice the jury against him. He did not doubt that Lady Tiger would let things take their course—that she would be willing to see him die instead of being banished, for then he would be out of her way, and she could come forth with her false will which would give her all the mines left by the Silver King.

It was a turning of the tide which the captain did not relish; but he ground his teeth while he listened for a sound, and at last leaned against the cold wall and folded his arms.

Meantime Lady Tiger had been informed of the arrest.

A strange smile overspread her face while she listened to the report, and when it had been delivered and the tough had fallen back after delivering it, she fell into a deep silence.

"Who is the witness against him?" she asked at last.

"The Man from Cinnabar."

"What, Major Hollyhock's pard?"

"Yes."

"He gave you the hint, did he? He hinted that Cyclone Kit was to be found at the bottom of the pit in the mine?"

"It was a hint we could not overlook and when we went thar we found Cyclone with a dagger wound in his heart."

"But the witness may not want to testify against Captain Satin-Slipper," said Lady Tiger. "Without him you have no proof?"

"None."

"There can be no condemnation without proof. You must see to that if you intend to punish Captain Satin-Slipper for the murder of the High Sheriff."

"Of course. In the first place the two men at the hotel are a menace to the Black Tribunal," she went on. "I hate them both and don't want to see them get a foothold here."

"The one from Cinnabar is as cool as a cucumber."

"Exactly, and Major Hollyhock is not far behind him when aroused."

"I believe that from what I've seen of him."

The Queen of Sheba seemed to think deeply for a moment.

Perhaps she recalled the visit to her house of Cool Claude and the story he had told her. It had sent her into the mountains in search of No Tung the mute Celestial and she had met with an adventure the sudden horror of which had not left her.

After the man's departure Lady Tiger shut herself up in her room and took a packet from a secret recess in the wall. Seating herself at the table, she opened it and took out a paper which she fell to reading with interest.

"This is the document by which I win," she said aloud. "With the mines of the Silver King in my hands, I can afford to relinquish all claims to the riches of Mark Mayfield and need not look further for the ruby ring. It was worth looking for, though. They must be rich mines, else the Man from Cinnabar would not be looking for the wife of their owner. Let me see: Banished from Red Vulture; driven from Leopard City; hunted by lasso and knife, to turn up here in Brimstone and become its queen. Truly, I've had an adventurous career since I left the little home on the banks of the Missouri. What hands I have played! What victories I have won! But this is to be the last one. When I shall have seized the riches of Brimstone—when I am at the end of the game here—I will break the deck and play no more. They will never find me. I am safe from the eye of the hunter of the past; I am all-powerful among the men of Brimstone Bar. I am empress here and the Black Tribunal belongs wholly to me."

Lady Tiger resumed her inspection of the document she had taken from the packet and did not hear the opening and shutting of the door beyond the room.

She was not disturbed by the figure that crept cat-like into the chamber, and from one of the corners crouched, watched her with the eye of a hawk.

This figure was small, and yellow in color. It had almond-shaped eyes, that fairly glistened, and hands that looked like claws, they were so long and slender.

Lady Tiger's shadow fell upon the wall behind her. It painted her shapely figure there in black, showing her proud head and fingers as they moved now and then, and not a sound arose to tell her of her danger.

All at once the form in the corner moved and came forward.

It approached the woman's chair, and at last, rising at her back, looked over her shoulder.

The eyes were fastened on the paper, and seemed to devour the writing there.

"This will makes me solid. It throws into my hands the wealth of this modern Ophir." She folded the paper and laughed to herself. "It gives me the ten bonanzas of Samson, the Silver King, and the last arrest clears my path."

She moved her chair back with the last word, and looked up.

The next second she seemed to sink into its very depths; her face lost every vestige of color, and the paper fell from nerveless hands.

She had encountered the baleful eyes of No Tung!

The silent Mongolian stood like a statue at the back of her chair.

"My God!" fell at last from Lady Tiger's lips. "When did you come in?"

Of course there was no reply, but the eyes of the Chinaman continued to stare at her, while his yellow hands stole forward, and would have picked up the forged will if, by a mighty effort, she had not recovered strength enough to snatch it up and hold it as far from him as she could.

"You can't have it!" she cried. "Go back to the mountains, for you are an exile."

A grin came to the parchment face of Captain Satin-Slipper's man, and the almond eyes twinkled wickedly.

"What, have you come back for mischief? Don't you know that I am mistress of the situ-

ation—that I have but to lift my hand to turn all the Celestial-hating dogs of Brimstone upon you? If you hold your life at anything, you want to pass through yon door at once, and never again cross the path of Lady Tiger, of Colorado."

She knew that he could read speech by the lips of the speaker, and that is why she went on so long.

But he never moved. The long fingers seemed to play with the flowers on the top of the chair, and No Tung was looking down into her eyes with all the devilish coolness of a Celestial assassin.

All at once the Queen of Sheba sprung from her seat, with the will clutched in her hand, and stood before him with the mien of a tigress.

"Tell me what you want," she cried. "I can't understand the motion of your fingers. I never tried to learn the language of the mute. A pencil lies on the table and the wall is yonder. You know how to write."

She pointed toward the wall and saw the hand of No Tung take up the pencil she had designated.

"Write and tell me what you want," she went on.

With another look at her the Chinaman moved to the wall which was but a step from the table and his hand went up.

"What will his yellow fingers write?" she asked herself.

No Tung paused a moment with the pencil in mid-air and then went to work.

"What is that?" cried Lady Tiger, leaning forward in her eagerness.

She could read without difficulty what the yellow man had written and it was this:

"No Tung has come back to stay."

"You have, eh?" she said, clenching her hands. "You have been banished and I won't have you around. Don't you know that it is worth your life to remain here a minute?"

He watched her lips till she got through, when his hand went to work again.

"No Tung is not afraid to stay. He knows something and Lady Tiger can't afford to lift a hand against him. She must save Captain Satin-Slipper from the Black Tribunal."

The white teeth of the pale woman met.

"Save him? I can't! He is in the grip of the Court for murder," she said.

"No Tung knows that, but she controls the Court now. She must save him."

"Is that all you demand?"

The sentence was couched in a sneer.

"No Tung wants a thousand for his silence."

Lady Tiger broke into a laugh.

"Why, you're silent enough now, though your accursed hands can talk when they want to," she said. "A thousand for your silence? What do you know?"

In reply there appeared on the wall a date at which Lady Tiger glared with her hands shut hard.

It was the date of Colonel Samson's death!

"In heaven's name, what is he up to now?" she ejaculated still watching No Tung. "He has turned artist, this yellow cat who used to sleep at Captain Satin-Slipper's door!"

Sure enough, the man from the Flowery Kingdom had turned artist, for he was drawing figures on the wall and she was looking at his moving fingers as though fascinated by them.

She saw him outline a man seated at a table; then there appeared behind him a female figure with uplifted dagger; she saw the gleam of murder on the woman's eyes, and such was the faithful portraiture that when No Tung by a single sweep of the pencil placed a bracelet on the uplifted arm, she fell back with a sudden cry.

Proud of his work and with a pair of glittering eyes, the Mongolian drew off and looked at her.

"Is that all?" cried Lady Tiger.

The yellow hand moved once more to the wall.

"What more does the Queen of Sheba want?" the pencil asked. "No Tung draws from memory."

She did not speak.

"No Tung's hand can talk to the men of Brimstone if his lips are silent," he wrote. "Does Lady Tiger want his hand to tell them what his head knows?"

She stood in the middle of the room with eyes riveted upon him.

"You want a thousand, do you?"

A nod.

"Anything more?"

"The liberation of Captain Satin-Slipper," said the hand at the wall.

"But he has been arrested for the murder of Cyclone Kit, the High Sheriff of the Black Tribunal."

"You can set him free."

Lady Tiger looked toward a certain corner of the room and saw there the safe where she kept some of her treasures, though she had not intrusted the will to it.

"Can I do it?" she said. "Can't I send a bullet through the head of this yellow pest?"

"You force me to yield," she answered No Tung, at the same time moving toward the corner.

He did not stir, but followed her with his eye. She reached the iron safe and opened it.

As her body bent over it her hand dived into its depths and was out of sight for a moment.

All at once it came to the surface, but there was something in it.

No Tung found himself suddenly covered by a revolver, the barrel of which glittered in the lamplight.

"This is the way I answer you!" cried Lady Tiger. "You will precede your master to Tartarus by a few minutes!"

The report of the pistol filled the room, and the woman, looking through the smoke for the dead body of her victim, felt a cold chill at her heart.

There was no body on the floor, neither could she see the man who had faced her and at whose heart she had just fired; but on the wall, in letters which seemed to stand out as though made of black marble, were these words:

"No Tung bears a charmed life!"

"I believe it! That Celestial is in league with the powers of eternal darkness!" gasped the Queen of Sheba.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MISSING WITNESS.

SOME time elapsed before the woman of Brimstone Bar recovered from her second attempt to take the life of No Tung, the Silent.

Once before in the mountains, as we have seen, she fired direct at the Celestial's heart and saw him standing erect on the trail after the shot. Now she had attempted his life a second time and instead of stretching him dead at her feet, she had seen him vanish as though the bullet had done him no harm.

She threw the revolver upon the table with a curse and falling back, stood for a while staring at the last words left behind by the pencil of the Chinaman.

"A charmed life he says he has and one would believe it from what I have seen. He knows more than I would have such a person know. Did my hand tremble and was the bullet fired wide of the mark?"

She went forward and examined the wall, but it had not been marred by a ball. This mystified her still further, and when she returned to the table there was fear in her eye.

Ten minutes later she was closeted with a man who had come in from the street, and he was listening to her with all ears.

Lady Tiger gave directions for the apprehension of No Tung, saying to the man at her table that he was somewhere in camp and that his intention was to release Captain Satin-Slipper before he could be brought to trial.

"There is to be no mercy shown this man from China," said she. "I want him shot on sight and buried where he will not be found."

The man nodded.

"His boast is that he bears a charmed life and I happen to know that two bullets sent at his heart have failed to finish him."

"Spanish armor under his coat."

"What, do you think so?" cried Lady Tiger. "The head, then. What a fool I was! I could have bored his skull and saved the coat the balls must have struck."

The man smiled and one of his big hands moved across the table.

"The Man from Cinnabar refuses to tell what he knows against Captain Satin-Slipper," he replied.

"Where is this man?"

"At the hotel."

"You will take a message to him from me," and she leaned forward and wrote a brief note to Cool Claude, inviting him to call at once at her house.

A few minutes later Lady Tiger saw the handsome spotter approaching her door and in a little time he was bowing to her.

"Have you rediscovered the lost ring?" asked Claude the Cool with a smile.

"Not yet, but I am the wife of Mark Mayfield all the same. The ring may never be found, but its absence shall not interfere with my plans. I relinquish all claim to the mines he left behind. I am satisfied to live here, the Queen of Brimstone Bar. But this is not what I want to say. You refuse to testify against the man who has been arrested for the murder of Cyclone Kit."

Cool Claude looked at her with a queer expression.

"I don't acknowledge the authority of the Black Court."

"But you know something against him?"

"I have not said so."

"They went to the deep pit at your suggestion, and found there the stabbed body of the High Sheriff."

"That may be, but I can't testify against Captain Satin-Slipper."

Lady Tiger was silent for a moment.

"You befriend a murderer when you withhold your evidence," were her next words.

"Lady Tiger, Captain Satin-Slipper is entitled to a fair trial. The Court into whose hands he has fallen has condemned him already. He is dead now so far as the verdict of the

Black Tribunal is concerned. There is no appeal from its decisions."

"And no escape from its grip!" said Lady Tiger with confidence.

"You boast of that."

Her jeweled hand fell upon the table in the bright light of the lamp.

"I do!" she cried, with flashing eyes. "There is no escape from grip of the the Black Tribunal of Brimstone Bar. Its touch is death. This kid-gloved desperado has forfeited his life, yet he had time to save it, for some minutes intervened between the banishment and the arrest. The Tribunal is merciless when it deals with the guilty."

"As when it dealt with the girl, Lucy Lynx?"

"Yes."

"Then, if Captain Satin-Slipper is sure to be condemned, why should I testify against him?"

"There should be some record left on the books of the Tribunal."

"Something to show that there was the form of a trial?"

Lady Tiger made no reply.

"This brawl is not of my making, hence I will not be mixed up in it," Cool Claude went on.

The woman seemed to glare at him with the intensity of a tiger.

"When do you leave Brimstone Bar on hunt of the wife of Mark Mayfield?" she asked.

"What need is there of my going if you are that person?"

"But you don't believe me."

"You claimed to have had the ruby ring, yet when you went to get it, you discovered that it had been stolen. Moreover, you promised to get it back. Why should I not wait for it?"

"Wait, then," said Lady Tiger. "Wait here as long as you please; but remember that you stay in this camp at your peril."

Cool Claude was seen to smile as he looked into the calm face of the Queen of Sheba.

"When did the Celestial come back?"

"What, have you seen him?" she cried.

"Why shouldn't I, when he crossed my path?"

"That yellow cat is continually crossing some one's way."

"Was he always a mute?"

"I don't know. I saw him once, I think, when he had the use of his tongue."

"Ah, was that when you were a tenant of Cabin No. 10, at Red Vulture?"

Lady Tiger seemed to gasp.

"You seem to have guessed a part of my past," said she, with a forced smile. "I saw No Tung at Red Vulture and I believe he could talk."

"And his name was—"

"Why ask me?" and Lady Tiger waved her hand impatiently. "You are not Jack Juniper, but another and totally different person. I am going to be plain to you, since you have touched upon the subject of the past. You are here for a purpose, and you have not stated it in my presence. You came to Brimstone Bar at the solicitation of the man called Hiram Hollyhock, of Homespun. You and he are in league, and you are his bloodhound. What your mission is I care not, for I am strong enough to baffle any scheme you may seek to play against my interests. You refuse to testify against Captain Satin-Slipper, now in the hands of the Black Tribunal. You shall never be called upon to deliver that testimony. The story of the ruby ring is a mere subterfuge of your own making. You are in a den of lions, and the only ally you have here is the man at the hotel, and he is helpless. The coils of the black Court mean death, and since you will not save your life by testifying against Captain Satin-Slipper, you are now almost as dead as he."

These words came from Lady Tiger's mouth as coolly as though she were talking to a friend.

There was no display of passion, and the only emphasis that accompanied them was the shutting of the lips after the last sentence.

"I am queen of the Black Brood, so-called," she went on in the same strain. "I am mistress of the situation, and I will say here that I am the sole heir of Colonel Samson's millions, and that the hand does not exist that can wrench one of them from me. I hold in my hand the destinies of every life at Brimstone Bar. I run the Court that has caged its one-time Judge, and as there is no escape for this gloved sport, so there is death to all who defy the Black Tribunal. Jack Juniper—I call you so though ten to one that such is not your name—I am more than the Queen of Sheba. I am the woman of two exilements, the victim of two Wild West courts. I have fought my way to the front and I shall keep myself there. Go back to your master. Tell him that whatever game he plays here, he shall see it fail. Major Hollyhock, eh? I could call him by his true name, but need not. You know it. You serve him whose coolness has doomed him to death, and the time is here when he shall curse the hour he entered Brimstone Bar to mark for vengeance the woman who stands before you."

The Spotter from Spottersville waited till the beautiful Cleopatra of Colorado had finished.

Her whole form trembled now and her eyes were diamonds in her head.

"There is to be no secret of my intention now," she continued as he was about to speak.

"It is war to the knife between us. I will have no human shadows about me. I intend to take possession of my own this very night. The Palace belongs to me. I hold the will of the Silver King and the house is better than one I inhabit and being mine I shall occupy it. From there will I issue my commands to the men who will do my every bidding, and Brimstone Bar shall have but one ruling spirit and that spirit myself."

She looked at him and saw him smile despite the words she had just spoken.

"Remember you stand warned! You and your pard are in the net. I know you have awed the brethren of the camp by our coolness, but that mastership has vanished. You can do that no more. Where once they fell back from your eye, they will laugh in your face. Jack Juniper, you are in a den of tigers and I say that I pity you for I like bravery. You cannot escape. This night the new hands are to be played and the sun when he rises will see a new order of things at Brimstone."

The detective felt that the interview was ended.

He touched his hat to the woman in his front and wishing her a merry time with her reign as Queen of Brimstone, withdrew, leaving behind him an odor of firmness that impressed the Lady Tiger and took her to the window from whence she watched him cross the Plaza.

She lost sight of his figure when he entered the Black Bowie and did not see him ascend the stairs to the little room over the porch which was occupied by Major Hollyhock.

"It was the hottest interview I ever had," said Cool Claude. "The crisis has been reached. The Queen of Sheba has taken the throne and the last hand is to be played. To-night she takes possession of the Palace—"

"My God! Lucy is there," interrupted the major.

"Yes, the victim of the Black Tribunal is there, and for her to be found by this woman means more than mere death. Willis Ware will not be disturbed, but the girl is in the greatest danger of her life."

"Why not play the big hand now?"

Cool Claude thought a moment.

"You do not recoil from the play, Claude the Cool?"

"It is not that," was the reply. "There is a person who ought to be found first."

"Captain Satin-Slipper?"

"No, the yellow man from the Flowery Kingdom."

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere in camp. No matter what happens we must not play our final hand without this mute Satan in yellow."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SATAN IN YELLOW.

THE return of the dumb Celestial was a menace which much disturbed the woman of Brimstone Bar.

She knew that he carried in his bosom a secret which she feared would get out and blight the plans she had formed for the future.

The rough sketch on the wall fresh from his hands was so terribly true to life that she proceeded to blot it out as soon as possible after his departure, so that when the detective came it was not to be seen.

As for No Tung he had slipped away under cover of night and when the men of the Black Court came to look for him he was not to be found.

If they had looked in the right place he would have been discovered, for No Tung had made his way to the mouth of the mine which was also the secret chamber of the Black Tribunal, and in a short time was creeping through the darkness of the corridors on the most exciting and most dangerous errand of his life.

The Chinaman had resolved to save Captain Satin-Slipper from the death-grip of the Tribunal, for his mission to Lady Tiger had failed and he was sure he could look for no leniency in that direction.

The mine-court had at one time been a bonanza which, playing out all of a sudden, had swamped its owners, and so had fallen into the meshes of the Tribunal to be fitted up for the sessions of this most merciless of Courts.

As the slave of Captain Satin-Slipper, No Tung had invaded before the recesses of the mine, and when he entered it with his cool resolution to give him nerve, he did not falter though he must have counted the danger and the cost.

The yellow man proceeded toward the confines of the trial chamber, the door of which he found immovable. He placed his ear at the lock, but heard no sound.

Turning aside, he moved away and did not halt again until he reached a spot where he crouched at the foot of a wall and applied one ear to the stone.

A twinkle came to his eyes and for some time he listened there as if he had made a discovery at last.

Presently there emerged from the wall as it were, the figure of a man. This person carried

a light which revealed his figure and told No Tung that he was armed to the teeth.

He stood for a second in the corridor as if to show off his form to the observant Chinaman, then moved away and soon had the Satan in lavender at his heels.

No Tung knew the man. He was the jailer of the underground Court—a man who seldom saw the light and never while there was a prisoner in the grasp of the Banded Brood.

The mute Celestial kept after the jailer till he saw him enter a room the small door of which he left ajar, showing that he looked for no spies at his heels in that gloomy place, when No Tung's movements became more interesting.

He crept toward the door, moving inch by inch over the floor of the corridor.

Jailer Jan knew nothing of this crawl.

It was like the creep of the leopard, or the sneaking advance of a tiger through the undergrowth of the jungle.

There lay along the Chinaman's sleeve a knife, which had a steely glitter which matched the gleam that lighted up his eyes.

No Tung did not reach the door for some time. He was making sure that he was not heard, and when he stopped it was at the threshold, and his almond eyes were glaring at a man who was helping himself to the contents of a black bottle which stood on a little three-legged stand before him.

Jan the Jailer, with an expression of contentment, sat and drank his fill alone. He had no thought of the little man at the door, and no knowledge of the yellow hand fingering the hilt of the knife which its owner knew so well how to handle.

At last Jan emptied the bottle and threw it in one corner, where its breaking was the only sound No Tung had heard for some time.

Standing erect, Jan looked toward the door, but did not catch sight of the figure there; then he came forward and looked out into the passage.

At his very feet in the dark crouched the man in yellow; a pair of eyes were fixed upon him, and the knife had vanished.

Suddenly the man on the floor of the mine moved, and then Jan went back and half-way across the room, a cry issuing from his lips and his eyes starting from his head beneath the grip of the lavender fingers.

"It is the captain's snake!" said he. "I am a fool for letting him pick me up this way."

No Tung had thrown all his agility into the spring. He forced Jan backward and bore him at last against the wall, overturning the table with which the lamp came down, and the place was wrapped in utter darkness.

Two minutes later a figure emerged from the scene of the battle. It not only shut the door behind it, but locked it, as well, and ran off in the gloom.

Captain Satin-Slipper's man had come out of the chamber alone, and it was his figure that fitted down the passages as if he had the eye of the owl.

Far away he stopped and felt a door with his silken hands.

He took a bunch of iron keys from his pocket and inserted one into the lock.

A moment later, exerting all his strength, he swung open the portal he had unlocked and entered the room before him. It was dark. The match he struck showed him an empty chamber and he did not remain.

Captain Satin-Slipper was not there.

With a look of disappointment, No Tung bounded away, and once more was running down the corridor.

He found another door and opened it in the same manner. The keys served him well.

But what he found there was as disappointing as before, and he was about to turn away and look elsewhere for his master when he ran to one corner and fell on his knees.

If this man was a mute, as all believed, why did he apply his ears, first one then the other, to the solid stone?

He did this till a smile lit up his strange eyes, when he arose and bounded off once more.

Three minutes later he unlocked a door with the last of the iron keys, and shut it after him.

Not only did he shut it but he locked it from the inside and crept on. No Tung was now in a strange part of the mine-court. If he had struck a match he would have seen footprints in the fine dust sprinkled over the floor of the corridor; but he preferred to move on in the dark.

The long hunt for Captain Satin-Slipper seemed to come to an end at last. The persevering Chinaman, who all the time had carried the knife along his arm, leaned against the stone wall that rose above him an interminable distance and ran his hands up its steep sides.

There were steps in the stone, not deep ones, but they were well worn and one could climb upward by using these steps.

No Tung did not hesitate long, but placed the knife in his mouth and began the ascent.

His agile body made good headway until he came to the middle of the climb, when his progress seemed barred by a projecting rock.

Captain Satin-Slipper's cat stopped and caught his breath, then began to screw his body

over the jagged obstruction and reach the other side.

It cost him many a hard effort, many a halt for breath and more than one drop of cold sweat. It was a struggle in the dark, but he knew that he was on the shortest trail to the man he sought, and that the surmounting of the rock might prove the salvation of the man he served.

When No Tung had climbed to the uppermost side of the rock he halted and drew several breaths of relief. The rest of the way did not seem difficult now.

He resumed the climb to reach at last a flat surface where he rested some minutes.

No Tung was confident now—sure that he was about to outwit the Branded Brood and rescue the Dude Desperado of the Bar.

He almost ran through the dark upper passage. Bats disturbed by him flew from their nests along the wall, and now and then brushed his face with their wings. He stopped not until he stood where he could put out his hands and feel nothing.

Five minutes afterward No Tung stood at a door and selected one of the ten keys in the dark.

Was Captain Satin-Slipper beyond the portal?

The mute Celestial unlocked the door and swung it open. In a flash he was inside and the gloom was dissipated by the birth of his match.

He held the little light above his head and looked.

What did he see?

On one side of the room stood a high post almost touching the wall and against it a human form with one hand lifted above the head.

The Man from China looked but a moment and then sprang eagerly forward. He held his match into the face of the person at the post and fell back with a strange guttural cry.

He had discovered the handsome desperado of Brimstone Bar! The gloved Adonis of Colorado stood before him, but nailed to the post, the head of the iron spike protruding from his palm and himself dead or in a faint, with the weight of his body hanging upon the crucified hand!

No Tung seemed completely unnerved by the sight. His match, burnt to his fingers, went out and he threw it down. A second was lighted and held up to the white face of the man at the post.

The hand was swollen and the dried blood on the wrist told how the current of life had trickled from the veins, but if there was life in the heart of Captain Satin-Slipper, there was little left to prove it.

No Tung seemed to get nerve by gazing at the terrible spectacle before him.

He bounded up at the hand and tried to tear it from the grip of the nail; but as well might he have tried to shake off the grasp of a giant.

He fell back exhausted and looked again at captain

Suddenly he picked up a stone which lay at his feet and returned to the attack. It was no time for gentleness and the Celestial hammered at the spike till he knocked it out and the body of Captain Satin-Slipper fell to the ground with a curdling thud.

No Tung rested a little while, when he struck another match and bent over the body of his master. He placed one hand beneath his jacket and smiled when he felt the beating of the heart.

There was life there!

The little eyes of the Chinaman seemed to glitter with satisfaction. He drew off for a moment and fairly danced for joy.

In a short time he went back to the captain and began to restore him to consciousness. It was up-hill work for he had arrived almost too late; but at last Captain Satin-Slipper opened his eyes and looked into the face of his yellow pard.

"Just—in—time!" said the swollen lips of the man in kids. "We will get even with her for this and— But the door! the door!"

No Tung sprang back and ran toward the portal, but he was too late.

The door had shut and the Captain of Brimstone Bar heard the sharp click of a key in the lock.

They were immured in the chamber of horrors—shut in like dying rats in a trap!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FRINGE OF A SECRET.

COOL CLAUDE realized the full meaning of Lady Tiger's words when she said she intended to take almost immediate possession of the Palace in which the Silver King had been mysteriously murdered.

That meant the discovery of Lucy Lynx whom he had rescued from the depths of the mine-court.

In order to prevent this discovery, he resolved to seek the girl and acquaint her of the impending danger, and remove her beyond its thrall.

Soon after his interview with the Queen of

Sheba he sought the Palace and entering it secretly found Lucy in the little chamber which she had inhabited since her escape.

"So she is coming to take possession of this house?" said the girl. "Why, it is not hers!"

"But the will, Lucy?" said the detective.

"It is not the true will," was the quick reply. "Colonel Samson never drew up a paper which made her sole legatee. I know what he did draw up for I witnessed it."

"You?"

Was the beauty about to dispossess herself of her secret.

"I thought I would not tell any one, but this will is not the true one," she went on. "A few nights before the crime, Colonel Samson came to my house and read to me the will he had just drawn up. I was to witness it and did so. There was another signature to it, and I put my name alongside of it. The will gave me everything."

"You, girl?"

"Me, Lucy Lynx. The Silver King gave me all his mines; he turned over to me everything he owned. I was thunderstruck when he had read the will, and remonstrated with him, but he was immovable. It was a mystery to me—one which he said he would clear up before he died."

"Did he do it?"

Lucy Lynx seemed to shrink within herself. "Let me stop here, for this brings me to the night of the murder," she said. "To answer you I must tell you the secret which has harassed me ever since. I dare not tell even you what passed between Samson and me that night. It was just before the crime—"

"The crime which you witnessed, girl?"

A cry broke over Lucy Lynx's lips and she hid her face in her hands.

"Let me keep what I know," she wailed.

"Don't drag from me that darkest secret a young girl ever had to keep. The crime I witnessed, you say. My God, let me alone!"

She broke from the detective's touch and fell back in her chair.

"I sometimes think it would be better for me to go back to the Black Tribunal and give myself up—to even avow myself the murderer and suffer the penalty."

"But you are not guilty."

"Not guilty?" and she laughed so strangely that Cool Claude wondered for a moment if she was entirely sane.

"The mute Celestial knows something about the acts of that night," he said.

Lucy shuddered.

"That yellow spy knows everything. He is always looking about for his master. I have seen him in this house when he was thought to be far away."

"But you said you were never in the Palace till the night of the crime."

"That is true. But I have passed it, and at one of the windows I have seen the face of that mystery in yellow, No Tung, the Chinaman. The night of the murder, Colonel Samson sent for me. I went, promising myself that I would let no one know of the visit. For safety I took with me my dagger. The sheath I left at home."

"Are you sure of this?"

"I am."

"It was found under the bushes in the yard by—"

"There!" and the white hand of Lucy Lynx closed on the detective's arm. "Don't breathe the name of that woman in this house. She found the sheath under the bushes; we all know that. I did not throw it there."

"Lucy," said the Man from Cinnabar, gently, "you are said to have confessed to having cast that very sheath where it was picked up by the woman whose name we will not speak."

In an instant the young girl's look became a stare.

"In the delirium of mental torture I must have made strange statements," she went on. "But the dagger sheath did not accompany me to this house that night. I came in at yon door, passing through this room to the chamber where I was to meet Samson, the Silver King. He was there. I found him pale, and when he talked his voice seemed to have lost its natural tones."

Once more Lucy Lynx paused and looked for a moment at the carpet at her feet.

"She is going to clear up the mystery," thought Cool Claude. "This girl has reconsidered her resolves and will tell me all."

But not another word did Lucy Lynx utter. She sat bolt upright and remained silent.

"Well, after you came together—what?" said Cool Claude.

"I have reached the boundary of my narrative," was the reply.

"Won't you tell more?"

"No."

Baffled again.

"As I have said, girl, you know who killed Samson, the Silver King, and you are shielding the guilty."

"I can't help it."

"You were willing to perish at the hand of the Black Tribunal rather than open your mouth."

She did not answer.

The mountain detective drew back and looked strangely at her. She was a puzzle sure enough.

"If the story is not to be told here, we must to work," said he. "Lady Tiger is about to take possession of her own."

"It is not hers, I say!" cried the girl, her eyes flashing again. "But I don't want to face her here and tell her it is not."

"She hates you."

"Ay, with the hatred of years," said Lucy.

"But she never manifested it till lately."

"No. I never crossed her path until a short time before the night of the seventh."

"Have you been a living secret to that woman?"

Lucy Lynx looked away, but the detective saw that his question had startled her.

"Did Lady Tiger ever come to your house, Lucy?"

"Once."

"When?"

"It was the night before the murder."

"What was her mission?"

"Theft."

"What, did she try to rob you?" cried Cool Claude.

"She not only tried, but succeeded," was the reply.

"What did she take?"

Lucy Lynx might have replied if she had not sprung forward and clutched the ferret's arm.

"A door opened yonder. I heard it," she cried. "Lady Tiger is in the house."

Cool Claude was on his feet in an instant.

Shutting off the light which threw a sickly gleam around the room he went to the door and listened.

Lucy with a white face watched him with eagerness and impatience; one of her little hands shut hard as if struggling with some great emotion.

"You are right, little girl," said Cool Claude coming back to her. "We are not the only tenants of the Palace at this time."

"Is she down there?"

"I don't know, but some one is."

"You heard her say that she intended to take possession this very night."

"She said that."

"Then she has come."

For a moment she looked like a person who is entrapped with no hope of escape, but all at once she became calm and her hand did not tremble when it fell upon Cool Claude's wrist.

"Let me face her," she said. "I beg of you to let me stand face to face with Lady Tiger?"

"With the Jezebel of Brimstone Bar? No. She wants your blood, girl."

"I know that."

"She would fly at you like a tigress—"

"Yes."

The detective went to the door again and listened once more. He could hear some one moving about in the rooms below, and the next moment a footstep came up the stairs.

Falling back from the door, he caught Lucy's arm and drew her after him.

"No meeting here," said he, with his lips at her ear. "The time has not come for you to show yourself to this witch of the hills. You know who I am, but not all of my mission is known to you."

There was no reply, and the feet on the stairs were distinctly heard.

Lucy Lynx, with wildly-beating heart, could look up into the dimly discerned face of the detective and wait. She could imagine the silken form as it came nearer and nearer; Lady Tiger was to her a figure of dread and of death, and she held her breath as she waited and looked across the room, toward the door.

She counted the steps till they reached the threshold. Cool Claude gently disengaged her arm and moved across the carpet.

He stopped near the door, and seemed to place his body between her and the portal as a living shield.

She saw in the detective's hand something she had not noticed before—a revolver, about which twined his cool hand.

"She will be here in a second," thought Lucy. "Then I will see once more the face so indelibly impressed on my memory."

Sure enough the door was opened, and the eager girl caught sight of a figure there.

Cool Claude bent forward and threw up the revolver.

"Halt!" he spake.

There was a slight cry, and the person on the step suddenly stopped.

It was the Queen of Sheba.

Lucy Lynx saw her agile and handsome form bend forward, as if she would see who had halted her, and then suddenly recovering, she fell back and stood erect.

"Back! Go down-stairs," continued Cool Claude. "You know me, woman. I am here to say that if you cross the step at which you stand, the game may end before you are ready for the ending."

"Ha! so I have found you in my house, have I? You, of all men! You, the bloodhound of Major Hollyhock, doomed, like him, to die like a dog before the Black Tribunal as the girl died!"

There was a cry which Lucy Lynx, with all

her resolution could not keep back. It startled Lady Tiger, and she was trying to pierce the dimness of the room, when she was seized by the grip of the Man from Cinnabar.

The next instant he was escorting her down the stairs of the Silver King's Palace, and the hand he owned seemed to sink to the bone.

"This is your last night on earth!" said Lady Tiger.

"All right, Madame Jezebel," he answered, with a cool smile.

CHAPTER XXV.

ARRESTED.

THE threat madly breathed by Lady Tiger was intended to be no idle one.

She said no more during the passage down the steps and in a short time she stood beyond the door of the dead nabob's palace.

Cool Claude, releasing her hand, went back and stood once more before Lucy Lynx.

"That woman is as much tigress as ever," he said.

"Yes; her nature never abates. I heard her threat against you. She will carry it out."

The response was a smile from the cool-head and he led the young girl to the door.

"You must quit this place," he said. "She may come back, for she may have heard your exclamation when she crossed the threshold."

There was no answer. Lucy was gazing at the opposite wall as if something attracted her there.

"Come," said Cool Claude. "We must go."

"Whither?"

"I will find a place for you."

"And you? Do you intend to remain and face this woman?"

"Why not?"

"The Black Tribunal is back of her."

"We know that."

"She will use it against you."

"Yes."

The girl could not but admire his coolness, which under the circumstances was foolhardiness.

But after awhile she permitted herself to be led from the Palace and by and by stood in a small underground room, the walls of which were smooth.

"You know where you are?" asked Cool Claude.

"I am in a mine, but whose I do not know."

"You are in the heart of the Crippled Cyclone—one of the mines which Colonel Samson abandoned years ago and which has not been worked since."

"You consider me safe here?"

"As safe where you now are as any place. I am satisfied that Lady Tiger never comes to this mine and that the members of the mountain Court never cross this floor."

A moment's silence followed and Lucy laid her white hand upon the detective's arm.

"You have told me that Willis Ware also escaped death at the hands of the Black Court," she said at last, a trace of anxiety in her tones.

"That is true. I saved him the same night I found you at the mercy of the Tribunal and in another part of the mine-court. He is not near you now, but he is safe. The time will come when he can step forward and declare himself. Just now such action would be dangerous."

A soft smile stole over the girl's face.

"I thank you, Cool Claude," she said.

"No thanks for duty," was the answer, and a minute later Lucy Lynx stood alone in the cavern, listening to the vanishing footsteps of the Man from Cinnabar.

Cool Claude went back to the city proper. He stole across the Plaza and entered Major Hollyhock's room, where he found that personage awaiting him with a good deal of impatience.

"The crisis is here. Look at that," and the major pointed to a bit of paper which lay on the table.

The detective picked it up, and the next moment smiled as he threw it down.

"They will be here in a minute," said Major Hollyhock.

Cool Claude glanced toward the window.

"The tigress has already shown her teeth," was all he said.

"With Captain Satin-Slipper in the grip of the Tribunal, we are liable to follow him."

"Perhaps."

"You have removed the girl, eh?"

"Lucy will not confront Lady Tiger when she takes possession of the nabob's Palace."

"Would she confess?"

"She would not. There is one secret which she will not divulge, though she leads one to the very verge of it."

"She knows who killed the Silver King of Brimstone Bar."

Cool Claude looked at the major for a moment and seemed to smile.

"She saw that crime committed," the major went on. "What a strange creature. She was in the house at the time. The deed was done with her dagger, and she was an eye-witness, yet she stubbornly refuses to tell who dealt the blow."

"You are right, major. Lucy Lynx has a secret which I believe she will never divulge."

"It has come near costing her her life."

"Yes. Even when in the clutches of the Tribunal, she refused to divulge it."

"It passes my comprehension. Without the revelation, my work will not be complete."

The Man from Homespun arose and walked the floor, his hands shut and his lips twitching nervously.

"We must strike the blow ourselves," he suddenly exclaimed, turning upon the detective, who was watching him. "We must either grapple with the Black Tribunal and its queen, or leave the trail and let the girl perish."

"You don't think of that for a moment," said Claude. "Come, major! You must keep before you the one great mission of your life. Remember, I have tracked some for you; that I have unraveled this skein until I almost see the end of it."

Major Hollyhock sprang forward and seized Cool Claude's hand.

"I will not forget!" cried he. "I know the wiles and the power of the Jezebel by whom we are confronted. I long to throw off my mask and stand before her in my true garb."

At this moment a noise came up the stair and both men looked at their revolvers.

In a little while the door opened and a head was thrust into the room. It was the head of the landlord of the Black Bowie and the moment he caught sight of the two pards, he said:

"The coast is clear just now. I thought I would tell you, for from what I've smelled out, thar's goin' ter be trouble inside o' twenty minutes."

"Trouble between whom?"

"You two an' the Court."

"The Tribunal?"

The man nodded.

"Look here, Red Dan," said Claude the Cool. "Are we to be taken to the bar of the Tribunal?"

"It looks that way."

"What has become of Captain Satin-Slipper?"

The landlord grinned.

"I guess the dandy pard has ceased to wear his kids, or, if he wears them still, they are on dead hands."

"Dare they kill one who has been their Judge?"

"Oh, the Tribunal dares to do anything."

"Who was Captain Satin-Slipper? Where did he come from?"

Red Dan, the landlord, shook his head.

"He came here the same dandy he is now, alive or dead," said he. "I wasn't here when he came. He never told any one from whence he came, and we don't ask questions at Brimstone Bar."

"Then, you haven't any idea from whence Captain Satin-Slipper came?" asked the detective.

"No," and with this Red Dan turned and stalked from the room.

"That man lied," said Cool Claude, turning upon Major Hollyhock.

"As cool a liar as ever I saw," was the response.

"He is the man who five years ago helped Captain Satin-Slipper to break the great bank at Lizard Gulch."

The major nodded.

"He has given us twenty minutes of grace. We are to be taken within that time."

The Man from Homespun went to the window and looked out upon the Square.

"Come here."

Claude the Cool stepped to his side, and the major's finger pointed down upon the Plaza.

A knot of men was to be seen at one side of it.

"The magazine is ready. It needs but the match."

Cool Claude did not speak.

They continued to watch the group till it moved toward the Black Bowie with military precision, and when near the porch every man raised his eyes toward the window and seemed to catch sight of the two men there.

Major Hollyhock and Cool Claude drew back and looked toward the door.

"They won't advance upon us till they have the signal from their mistress," said the latter. "If we fall into the hands of the Black Court, what?"

"We must get out again!"

The lips of the cool-head were seen to part in a smile.

"It is a trap—the jaws of which are as merciless as they are strong. It will show us no mercy and she will see that we are prevented from carrying out our game. That woman is the coolest one I ever fought and she is capable of doing anything."

"With those men to back her, you mean?"

"With the Black Tribunal at her beck and order."

"Samson, the Silver King, knew her all the time. He watched her when she thought no one was on her trail and the paper which she holds as his will is a rank forgery which, if we are killed by the Court, will make her the richest woman west of the Rockies. I don't care for this particularly; I care not how much money falls to her lot; but you know why I am here and almost who killed Colonel Samson and why."

Before Cool Claude could reply a sound came to their ears and he went to the door.

"They are down there," he said, looking into Major Hollyhock's face. "The time has come to meet the Black Tribunal of Brimstone Bar. We know what it is; we have seen its power and need not underrate it. We know something of the woman who controls it. She is our bitter enemy. She has sworn that neither of us shall escape the doom of her infernal Court. Shall it be fight, or shall we go down when called and walk into the trap?"

Major Hollyhock's face seemed to get new color. He took a sudden step toward the door and threw it open.

"Let's go down and face them," he said.

At that moment the door below opened and they heard voices of men.

"You need not come up for we are coming down," he cried out.

There was the noise of men making way for the two cool-heads of Brimstone and the next moment they were on the steps.

They went down together, side by side, and when they entered the bar-room where the toughs stood there was an involuntary movement from them.

"Where is Lady Tiger?" asked the major.

"She didn't have to come," was the reply.

"We arrest you by order of the Tribunal!"

The two pards were looking into the faces of twenty men and could see that as many revolvers were gripped by dark hands.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

IN her own house not far from the scene at the hotel stood the woman who was the cause of it all.

"They will not resist for they know my power and that I am determined to play this game to the end," she said as if addressing some one. "Ere this they are in the grip of my Court and for them there is no escape. I would like to know, however, who Major Hollyhock is and what really brought Jack Juniper to Brimstone Bar. He tried to play the ring story, making me believe for a spell that he was looking for the wife of Mark Mayfield; but he has a deeper motive than that. The Celestial I do not fear. I can crush No Tung the moment he shows his head and I will do it. Captain Satin-Slipper, nailed to the post in the depths of the mine-court, is dead ere this and out of my way. What is to prevent me from becoming the richest woman west of the Rockies? Nothing can escape me. With this last triumph, I can show the will and take possession of the ten bonanzas."

Lady Tiger looked out and saw the stars shining on the dusty street that ran in front of her house.

For some time she remained at the window and watched the play of starlight on the dust, but all at once turned away and fell back.

A face had almost touched the pane—a face like a bearded monster's and for a moment the Queen of Sheba stood off, glaring at it and wondering from whence it had come.

It vanished as suddenly as it had appeared and when she went back to the window it was not there.

The next moment footsteps came toward the house and the door was opened.

"We have them," said the man who touched his hat to her.

"Both of them?"

"Yes."

"Did they show fight?"

"No; they came down-stairs before we could call them and walked into the grip of the Court."

Lady Tiger seemed to start. She evidently expected the two pards to resist.

"Where are they, Luke?"

"Over yonder," said the messenger of the Tribunal pointing over his shoulder.

"On the way to the mine?"

"Yes, Lady Tiger."

The eyes of the beautiful woman were seen to flash.

"Take them on and wait for me," she said.

"They are not to be tried till I enter the Court from the judicial door. Remember!"

Once more the stalwart tough touched his hat and was gone.

"It is done!" said Lady Tiger, with a light laugh of triumph. "I have the last enemies in my grip, or in the clutches of the Black Tribunal. It means the same thing. This man who came miles to meet me—this person who, for convenience's sake, masquerades under the queer name of Major Hollyhock—is at the end of his string. He wants to know who took the life of Colonel Samson; he sent for his bloodhound immediately after the death in the Palace, and the ferret has found out but little—not enough to do him any good. Shall it be rope or post? They are in my hands; they have fallen into the iron grip of the dread Tribunal of Brimstone Bar, and they must perish there!"

She retired to another room, and when she emerged from it her face was partly covered by a close-fitting mask of black, which was re-

lieved in the center by a gold serpent's head, and thus disguised, she left the house.

Crossing the Plaza, she went down into the mouth of the mine-court, and found her way along the lightless corridors by means of her hands, which she moved along one of the walls. It was a journey in the dark, and when she stopped she felt a latch which seemed set in a door of stone, and was about to open it when something touched her arm.

"My God! what was that?" cried Lady Tiger, falling back with the cold grip of fingers at her wrist.

"Don't go in till I tell you something," said a voice at her ear.

"Jan the Jailer!"

She had found the man who kept the secrets of that underground Tribunal—the dark-faced Cerberus, who seldom came to the light, and, still gripped by his icy hand, she was conducted deeper into the mine, and brought at last into a little room where a candle sputtered on a stone.

"What is it?" asked Lady Tiger.

Jan the Jailer laughed.

"I must tell you. I was pounced upon not long ago by the Celestial cat who used to sleep at Captain Satin-Slipper's door. He must have tracked me through the dark, as if he has eyes that can see when everything is as dark as midnight. Well, he had the advantage of me, and I was thrown across this room by his assault. When I came back to life, for his fingers seemed to meet in my throat, I was alone, and No Tung was gone. He had taken with him my keys—"

"Heavens, not your keys," cried Lady Tiger.

"Yes. I knew at once that he was looking for his master, and so did not lose any time. I started in pursuit of the cat; I followed him up the ladder in the wall, but took the short cut and reached the cavern where we left Captain Satin-Slipper nailed to the post. No Tung was already there. He had released his master and was trying to bring him back to life on the floor."

The face of the woman listening to this narrative was as white as snow.

"But you barked the yellow rat, Jan?" she cried. "You did not let him succeed?"

"I shut the door upon them!" laughed the jailer of the Tribunal. "No Tung had left it ajar, and I swung it shut, and there they are—walled up in the Chamber of the Post!"

"Good!" cried the woman, her eyes filling with a gleam of joy. "You shall lose nothing by your bravery. You have walled them in and they will be found there by the angel when he comes. It is well. The cat and his master perish together and we have but one other blow to deal. The two pards of the Black Bowie are now in my hands. I am the sole mistress of the Tribunal, and the Court is about to pass sentence upon the two hunters who have been playing their hand in this camp."

Jan, the Jailer, looked for a moment into Lady Tiger's eyes and then came forward.

"I have served you well, my lady," said he.

"Like a faithful slave, Jan."

"I have lived in this place, doing the bidding of the dread Court with the guilty fear."

"You have shrunk from no commission. I would trust my life in your hands."

He came nearer still.

"Lady Tiger, what is to be my reward?" he asked.

"Anything you ask for," was the reply.

Did she catch the strange twinkle in the eyes that confronted her? Did she see the light which the candle but illy showed with its sputtering on the stone?

"Jan will ask a reward," he went on. "He has not been unmindful of your beauty and, then, he wants to live where it is light and with the woman who has his heart."

The Queen of Sheba started back, but the hand of the jailer caught her wrist.

"I am in dead earnest," he said. "I am in love with the only woman who ever turned my head and heart. You are that one. I have served you well, living down here like a weasel, doing your every bidding and taking care of the prisoners who were condemned by the Black Tribunal, guarding them till life went out. You have just said that I shall have anything I ask for for my reward. I ask for you, Lady Tiger. Say that I shall have the Queen of Sheba and—"

She broke from him with an effort that seemed to tear her wrist.

She turned and fled from the chamber and did not stop when she found herself on the outside.

Down the corridor came feet as swift as hers, Lady Tiger, with her heart in her throat, kept on running through the dark, now and then feeling her way by touching the wall on either side of the passage.

"That man's wife? Heavens, no!" she cried. "I never thought he would ask for my hand. Why, he is half-snake with his little eyes, just the wretch to guard men till they die, but not the person to marry. I must reach the door of the Court—then, Jan, the Jailer, you will never make love to another woman."

She looked back, but all was dark. Still she

could hear the footsteps of the man in pursuit of her and the sound lent speed to her limbs.

On, on went Lady Tiger.

At last she paused exhausted. She had missed the trail leading back to the door of the underground court, and stood panting in the gloom along the wall.

All at once the hand of the Queen of Sheba drew a dagger and wound her white fingers about the hilt.

She turned toward the man running down the passage and waited with welded lips.

If one could have seen her in that place, waiting like a tigress at bay, he would have shrunk from her with sudden fear. Not a muscle moved; she stood like a statue, her hand thrown back, while she tried to pierce the gloom and make out the man on her trail.

All at once the sounds ceased. What had become of Jan the Jailer? Had he given up the chase, unwilling to run the risk of running against a dagger in the dark, or was he slipping down the corridor with the tread of the panther and the mien of that same sleek beast?

Lady Tiger thought the moments were hours while she stood at bay with the dagger in her grip. She could see nothing. Indeed, she really wished that Jan would come on. She wanted to plunge the cold steel into his throat, and thus remove a lover who might prove dangerous now when she had reached the very pinnacle of triumph, and the last enemies against her were in the grip of her Court.

"She is like an eel. I don't see how she slipped away so well."

It was with difficulty that Lady Tiger suppressed a cry at these words, which had been spoken at her very elbow.

Jan the Jailer was within reach of her hand, yet she drew back and held her breath.

He had stopped and was catching his breath while he wondered what had become of her.

By and by she leaned forward, as if she would see where his breast was; the hand that held the knife tightened on the ivory hilt, and her glowing eyes searched the darkness.

"I wish my fingers had the eyes of an owl," said the woman, in undertones. "I wish I could see where his heart beat. I would not miss a target like that, but I would give it the full length of the steel, and there would be a vacancy in the jailership of the mine-court."

In vain, however, did she seek her human target in the gloom of the mine, and at last, falling back again, she waited for him to come on.

"I guess she's gone back," said Jan. "I have lost her, but she knows what sort of reward I look for, and nothing short of it will do me. She needn't object to marrying me. I know something of her past. Don't I remember the night she went out of Leopard City, her proud eyes flashing and her back cut into strips by the lash of the Masked Nine? I wonder what she would say if she knew who plied the whip that night? Yes, I'd like to see her eyes when told that the man who has just made love to her is the wielder of the cat-o'-nine tails—the masked whipper of the Nine."

A cry broke over Lady Tiger's lips. That was too much. She could not have kept silent if her life depended on a still tongue.

With a hoarse cry which betrayed her to the man who had spoken, she bounded forward, her hand feeling for the throat of Jan the Jailer and the dagger in mid-air.

"I've found her!" cried the man in the dark.

"And my prayers have been answered!" cried Lady Tiger. "I have prayed to be permitted to stand face to face with you once more. I recall that night of shame and torture. So it was your hand that plied the lash? Well, it is mine that wields the dagger!"

She had found the man in the corridor; she had forced him against the wall and was in the act of driving the steel to his heart—she knew where it was now—when a voice startled her and held back her hand.

"For heaven's sake, No Tung, let me stop a moment and renew my oath. I want to swear to nail to the post without mercy and with the same iron spike, the beautiful witch of Brimstone Bar!"

The uplifted hand of Lady Tiger dropped and her teeth met in a grating sound.

She knew who had spoken. Captain Satin-Slipper and his slave—No Tung, the mute Celestial—had escaped from the Chamber of the Death Post!

The voice seemed to unnerve her, and during the fright a hand threw her from her victim and Jan the Jailer bounded away before she could recover.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DRAUGHT OF RED MURILLO.

MEANTIME Major Hollyhock and Cool Claude had been conducted to the underground court of the Black Tribunal. They stood in the vaulted mine-chamber devoted to the secret sessions of the dread body and waited for the appearance of the woman who controlled it.

They were alone, the men who had brought them to the spot having withdrawn to assume the masks which they wore when a victim was on

trial for his life, and amid the silence that prevailed they could take in their surroundings and converse if they wanted to in ominous whispers.

An hour passed, but no one came back. They knew that they would be watched in secret, and did not try to explore their prison beyond looking at the walls by which they were hemmed in.

At last a door swung open in the wall and ten men in masks filed into the place.

These ranged themselves around the wall and stood like statues, eying the two captives, but by no sign letting them know that they were about to hear the sentence of death.

Every now and then the masked desperadoes looked anxiously toward the back of the dais upon which stood the chair of the Judge—the one from which we have seen Lucy Lynx receive her dread sentence from the hidden lips of Captain Satin-Slipper.

It was evident that they were waiting for some one and that that person did not come.

Suddenly a noise sounded upon the ears of all, the door concealed by a curtain stretched across the chamber at the back of the throne opened slowly and a man stepped forward.

A murmur of dissatisfaction arose at sight of him and the men in the mask started back.

"Take the prisoners to the round chamber!" said this person, covering the two friends with outstretched hand.

He wore a mask like those on the floor of the room, but his garments were covered with the yellowish dust of the mine corridors, and all were looking at him as though they doubted his authority.

"I speak for the Queen of Sheba," continued this person. "Take them away!"

There stepped from the wall a man taller than his companions, and facing the one on the dais, he cries out:

"She never sent a command by you before. We know that you are no one but Jan the Jailer, and—"

A laugh broke in upon the speaker, and once more the hand above the platform covered them all.

"I speak for Queen Tiger," he said. "Woe to the man who questions my authority!"

The masks looked at one another. Some fell back and glanced at the door by which they had entered the chamber, but the boldest—among them, the tall man in the middle of the room—seemed rebellious still.

"What more do you want for proof than this?" said Jan the Jailer, holding up in the light something that glittered. "Behold the ring of your mistress, men of Brimstone Bar."

"That is enough!" cried several.

"I thought it would satisfy you. Away with the prisoners of the Tribunal."

Men came forward and seized the two pards, and they were taken from the room.

Beyond the chamber all was dark, and the moment they left it the lips of Cool Claude almost touched the major's ear.

"There is some devilment in all this," said he. "Jan the Jailer is playing a hand of his own. He is not the man Lady Tiger would intrust with a mission of this kind. The man is the wretch who used to be the whipper of Leopard City. I recognized him the day I came to Brimstone Bar, for I had a description of him, and there is a reward for his head."

The door closing behind the two men, left Jan, the keeper of the Tribunal's keys, in possession of the council-chamber. He stood in the chair for a little while, his dark eyes flashing, and his hands in a strange quiver.

"If she gets loose I will pay for this brief authority," said he. "If Captain Satin-Slipper finds her I will be safe, for he will pay her back for the nail in the hand. What shall I do first? I can never become the husband of Lady Tiger, because I whipped her within an inch of her life, and she will get even with me if it takes the last drop of her blood. Shall I go and look for them all? Why not? If the men of Brimstone discover that I have played this hand without authority, even though I displayed Lady Tiger's ring, my life won't be worth a candle moth's."

He stepped from the chair and vanished through the door by which he had entered the place and in another moment was flitting down one of the corridors of the mine-court with his hand on the hilt of a dagger which he had drawn in self-defense.

Jan, the Jailer, was in desperate straits. He had found Lady Tiger after the last encounter in the dark. He had slipped away from Captain Satin-Slipper and No Tung, and coming accidentally upon the woman who had held him at the mercy of the dagger for a second, had torn her ring from her finger in a scuffle and flung her from him the second time, to make his way to the Court and remand Cool Claude and Major Hollyhock to the Round Chamber for future trial.

He stopped somewhere in the dark and listened. He did not like his surroundings one bit. Captain Satin-Slipper was as dangerous an enemy as Lady Tiger. He did not stop to wonder how No Tung and his master had escaped from the Chamber of the Death Post; they were out of it, and that was enough.

Jan heard nothing by listening carefully along the wall and in the vaults of the long corridors.

If Lady Tiger had finally escaped from the grip of the man she had sentenced to death and had not returned to her followers in the court, she had, in all probability, returned to her house in Brimstone, and Jan resolved to look for her no longer in the mine.

He went on and on until he stood under the stars and could see the lights of the camp.

He wore a determined look, for well he knew that discovery meant death.

Lady Tiger had indignantly rejected his addresses, and then, she had learned that he was the whipper of Leopard City and that it was his hand which laid on the lash years before, the marks of which whipping she still carried on her fair person.

Of course, with his past unmasked to her, there was no hope for him at Brimstone Bar.

As for Lady Tiger, she had gone home.

Missing the chamber where the two men were waiting for her with the coolness of old hands, she emerged from the mine and at last crossed her own threshold and threw herself into a chair.

She showed signs of her thrilling adventures underground.

She sat still for some time, glaring first at the ground and then at the door, as if she expected some hunter to enter and face her with some story of the past.

"Out, are they?" she suddenly cried. "Captain Satin-Slipper and his accursed man are at large, but I have the others caged. I have Major Hollyhock and his ferret in my grip and they are safe there. But I don't like the thought of the two friends being out. I hate the ground Captain Satin-Slipper walks on. He will try to play a hand—desperate it will be from what I heard him say to his yellow cat in the mine. I must strike. I must take care of this Dandy Desperado. I used to know how to handle him and will see if I have lost my grip. I am to win this game or perish. I shall stand successfully at the end of this wild drama or die with the victors dead at my feet."

Once more she went out, and seeing a light in an open door, walked toward it and entered one of the drinking dens of Brimstone.

There were few at the tables at that hour. The lights of the den fell upon less than twenty men playing at the benches, and all looked up in amazement when she came forward.

Lady Tiger seldom came to that place. She had held herself above visiting Jarisco Jose's ranch, and the little owner, who looked out of the only eye a fight had spared him, almost crossed himself in astonishment.

Lady Tiger came down the sawdust aisle with her bright eyes fastened on the man behind the bar, and leaning over it, looked into the yellow face of Jarisco Jose.

"Some Red Murillo," said she, with a smile.

Now, if there was liquid fire in Jose's establishment it went by the name of "Red Murillo," and the little one-eyed barkeeper looked at Lady Tiger as though she had asked him for a kiss.

"I want it—for myself, too," she went on. "You have it, Jose. Set out your poison."

Jose's hands moved beneath the counter and produced the bottle that held the liquor.

Lady Tiger poured out a goodly quantity, and holding it between her eyes and the lamp for a moment, drained the contents of the glass and replaced it on the counter with a gold coin at the bottom.

Her eyes had a flash when she turned to leave the place. The infamous stuff was already at work, and when she reached the door and looked back at the men at the tables, there were suppressed fits of laughter.

"In the name of Caesar's ghost, what's up?" asked half a dozen of the toughest. "She never did that before, eh, Jose?"

"Never asked for anything at my counter," said the man, crossing himself with his dirty hand.

Lady Tiger felt the night wind on her cheeks when she struck the street. If the men of Jose's den had known that the recollection of a whipping given years before had caused her to gulp down the vilest rot-gut in Brimstone, they would have had a different opinion of the queen of the camp; but they knew nothing of the scenes underground.

She went back to her house and took from beneath the couch upon which she slept a little whip which had marks of age; and that the whip, small as it was, could cut like a razor's blade was apparent by its looks, and when she went out she carried it upon her person.

"For each lash then, ten now!" she said, with a hiss. "The others can wait."

Woe to Jan the Jailer if Lady Tiger finds him. Woe to the man who dared to make love to her in the dark after what had passed in Leopard City in Northern Colorado.

She was about to quit her house when the door, swinging open, revealed a man at whom she sprang with a cry of joy.

"What did you do with them, Jack?" she cried. "Are they still in the toils?"

"Yes; we took them to the Round Chamber by your command delivered by Jan?"

"By that wretch? I sent no word by him."

"But he came and showed your ring and—"

The Queen of Sheba looked down at her hand and lost color.

"Where is he?"

The man shook his head.

"A hundred ounces for the living body of Jan the Jailer!" she exclaimed. "Send this man to me. Scour the mine and the whole country but what you find him. And if you discover Captain Satin-Slipper and his Chinese cat, bring them to me, as well."

"But they are safe in the Death-post Chamber."

"The Celestial has released his master. Away! Let this be the death-hunt of Brimstone Bar!" and, alone once more, Lady Tiger in a frenzy of rage cut the air with the whip till she sunk exhausted into the chair.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CAPTAIN SATIN-SLIPPER'S STORY.

CAPTAIN SATIN-SLIPPER leaned against a pillar of stone and was watching a little man with almond eyes who was dressing his hand after his rescue from the death-post of the secret dungeon.

No Tung was very busy and the way he worked told the Dude Desperado that he knew something of surgery, and that under his care he would in time recover the use of the wounded member and live to pay the Queen of Sheba back.

They were no longer underground, but in the heart of one of the mountains that overlooked Brimstone Bar, and the stars, though they studded the vaulted heavens like a vast diamond field, did not afford very much light, but still there was enough for the yellow surgeon at work.

When the hand had been dressed Captain Satin-Slipper looked at the Chinaman and said:

"Don't you think it time to break your long silence?"

The queer eyes glowed, but No Tung shook his head.

"You have played mute pretty well," continued the dandy of the Bar. "You haven't spoken a word for years and now I don't see any occasion for continued silence."

No Tung smiled.

Captain Satin-Slipper twisted his mustache a moment and went on.

"We are doomed, both of us. The Queen of Sheba has marked us for the Black Court and if she finds us there will be a struggle of life and death."

No answer.

"What, do you think we may find her first, No Tung?" laughed the captain. "There is something in that. Two days have elapsed since we got out of the mine with our lives. If we had caught her the night we got out of the old chamber we would have left a vacancy for the queen-lovers of Brimstone to fill. You know a good deal about Lady Tiger—more than I do, and I know not a little. You have been her shadow; you know where she was the night Colonel Samson was murdered in the Palace. You had your eyes with you that night and when you crept from the shadows of that house you carried in your bosom a secret which is there to-day. Don't you think you can afford to tell it to me? We are all alone now. These rocks haven't ears and we know we will keep each other's secrets."

The Celestial looked away toward Brimstone Bar and for a time his eyes glistened.

"He is going to talk," said Captain Satin-Slipper.

But instead No Tung raised his eyes and slowly shook his head.

"What, you won't trust your old friend, the captain?" he exclaimed. "Well, keep the secret."

No Tung stood up and pressed Captain Satin-Slipper's hand.

He stood on tip-toe till he almost touched the Dandy Desperado's face and his hand was withdrawn.

"Well, since you won't tell me anything I am going to be more liberal and tell you something," said Captain Satin-Slipper.

No Tung nodded.

"There was a time when Lady Tiger was something else," he said. "I saw her long before she settled here at Brimstone and then she had a husband. But when she came among us with her tiger eyes and pretty face to play Cleopatra in the Sangre de Christo Hills she was alone. No Tung, when I saw you look upon her for the first time on the Square of Brimstone I knew that you had seen her before; but I did not know that it was when she went out of Red Vulture at the muzzle of fifty revolvers. You have watched her time and again and I have caught her trying to recall your face, for it was evident that she had seen you before. Yes, I knew Lady Tiger when she was not the Queen of Sheba. Now, in the course of time there came to Brimstone Bar this man who turned into gold everything he touched—this man whom we called Colonel Samson, the Silver King. He was a wonderful man, No Tung."

Captain Satin-Slipper paused a moment and looked away.

"Lady Tiger shook like a leaf the first time she saw Samson. I saw the meeting and she had to leave his presence to overcome her emotion. The next time she had nerves of steel and there was no tremor at all. She had simply schooled herself to meet him without flinching, that was all. After that they met a thousand times and while Samson made money hand over fist, picking up one bonanza after the other, she played leopard with her fawning and ended by becoming the head of the Black Court. I never saw such playing. I was the head of that merciless Tribunal for awhile, but now it wants my blood and is directed by the soft white hand of this creature."

"There was a mystery about Colonel Samson which Lady Tiger knew the moment she came in contact with him at Brimstone Bar. She knew who he was and what he had been. She did not watch him for nothing, neither did she watch Lucy Lynx, the young girl who has perished by the hand of this modern Herodias. The girl stood in her way, to what?"

The eye of No Tung, the Mongolian, did not move. He was watching Captain Satin-Slipper with the face of an Indian, and waited for him to proceed.

"The night Samson was killed—a crime which, as you know, was fastened upon Lucy Lynx by Lady Tiger—I sat in my favorite room, recalling several things connected with my past. I was alone. All at once a footstep broke a twig under my window, and I went forward. The moon had just come up over the mountain spur, and was shining on the ground in front of the house. I saw some one crouching there, and a second look told me that I was gazing at a woman. Presently it arose and ran away, but I had seen something of it—enough to recognize the figure. Whose do you think it was, No Tung?"

The little man in yellow shook his head.

"It was Lady Tiger, the Queen of the Bar. At that moment, though I knew it not, Colonel Samson sat dead in his chair, stabbed to the heart by a dagger. She ran off a short distance, and turned and looked at the house. I watched her and saw her take from her bosom a paper which she seemed to hold up in triumph for a moment, when she wheeled and fled again. Lady Tiger held in her hand a paper, which was that night taken from the Palace. She had secured a document which does not exist now, but another one is in its place."

"Now, as to Colonel Samson's relations with that woman, and here I must bring in one of the two men who are at the Black Bowie."

The little eyes, which had not lost sight of Captain Satin-Slipper's face for a moment since the opening of the narrative, got a new glitter.

"If there had been no Colonel Samson, no Lady Tiger, and, I believe, no Lucy Lynx, the man called Major Hollyhock would not have come to yon camp. Neither would the other one, Claude the Cool—who is but a ferret in the major's employ. Those two men are at work on a mystery. They have promised to ferret out a crime which was committed years ago, and by whom? No Tung, I don't believe I have to tell you much more. You have the cunning of a fox, and as you knew Lady Tiger before she ever set foot in Brimstone Bar, you know something more than that. I am going to ask you a question, and I want an answer. What ever became of the record of the marriage? He wasn't fool enough to destroy it, was he?"

No Tung started up again, and his eyes fairly snapped. In another moment his fingers were moving in front of Captain Satin-Slipper's face.

"I would sooner you would talk with your tongue," said the captain. "I can't read your fingers as fast as I would like to."

The fingers kept on.

"I thought he wouldn't destroy the marriage record," he said. "He brought it to Brimstone, did he?"

No Tung nodded.

"What became of it? Did she find it that night?"

The Chinaman's answer was the sudden disappearance of one of his hands in his bosom and the next second he drew out a bit of yellowish paper at which Captain Satin-Slipper made a dive, but it was jerked out of his reach.

"Is that the original document?" he cried. "Why, that is enough to turn the Banded Brood against her. Let me see it."

No Tung relinquished the paper with reluctance and Captain Satin-Slipper leaned over it and struck a match along the stone.

"This is it! This is the certificate of Colonel Samson's marriage; but, No Tung, there was another."

The Celestial smiled.

"You know it, eh? Don't you think Major Hollyhock knows it, too?"

A nod.

"Lady Tiger would give one-half of her interest for what I hold in my hand. It proves too much for her—it fastened upon her the motive; the motive I say, No Tung."

Captain Satin-Slipper looked at the paper, the lines upon which were barely visible in the glare of the match, and when he had studied it

awhile he handed it back to his companion. In another moment it was back in the Chinaman's bosom.

"Keep that for the last big play," said the captain. "Don't let that paper get out of your reach. It is worth your life to carry it, but you know that, No Tung."

Five minutes later the pair were some distance from the spot and Captain Satin-Slipper, turning suddenly, pulled No Tung back into the bushes and held him there.

They had reached a place directly above Brimstone Bar and could look down upon the lights of the mountain camp.

In a few seconds a band of men of men filed along, their arms almost touching the two men hid in the bushes, and when they had passed, Captain Satin-Slipper looked into No Tung's eyes and significantly touched his breast where the paper was hidden.

"We are exiles," said he. "We are hunted by the Banded Brood of the Bar. There is a price upon our heads, placed there by the beautiful tigress who rules in your jungle. The men who have just passed are her bloodhounds and we are the prey. How do you like it, my boy? How do you like being hunted by such trailers?"

No Tung was looking down the trail taken by the ten men of Brimstone Bar, and Captain Satin-Slipper could see that his hands were shut till the nails seemed to lose themselves in the palms, and he looked for all the world like a panther imported from some Indian jungle and ready to leap upon a victim under the trees.

The ten vanished and for some time the pards stood in the trail looking in the direction they had taken.

There was no doubt as to their mission. Captain Satin-Slipper and his right-bower were outlawed, and by the command of the tiger-queen of the camp.

Their capture meant death without the formality of a trial by the Black Tribunal, and they would have to fight desperately for life against the machinations of that one fair woman who was the terror of the Sangre de Christo Hills.

"Come," said Captain Satin-Slipper, taking hold of No Tung's arm. "We must not remain here. They may come back. Our day will come by and by."

For a moment the Chinaman did not move, only he threw his right hand toward heaven and appeared to register on high a vow so terrible that it paled his face, though not a sound issued from his lips, and when his hand fell to his side, he walked away with a gleam of fiendishness on his lavender face.

"Woe to you, Lady Tiger, if by mischance you fall into the hands of my mute pard," Captain Satin-Slipper said to himself.

A moment later the two friends were picking their way down the trail and the lights of Brimstone Bar alone shone on over the gambling-tables of the monte dens.

The end of the game could not be very far off.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE REVELATION OF A FACE.

If Lucy Lynx thought she was safe in the mine to which Cool Claude had conducted her for the purpose of taking her beyond the reach of Lady Tiger's hands, she was mistaken.

While the Queen of Sheba still thought that the girl had perished by the dreaded Court of Brimstone Bar, she was liable to discover at any time that this was not the case.

There was one man who knew that the detective had rescued Lucy while cooped up in the underground dungeon; that, almost at the same time, he had effected the release of Willis Ware whom he saw last battling with the three masked men who had invaded his cell for the purpose of carrying out the sentence of the Tribunal.

The person who had knowledge of these secrets was not likely to impart his information to Lady Tiger, for he was Jan, the Jailer, who, by the merest chance, had made the discovery, and being a suitor for the hand of the beautiful queen of the camp, he had resolved to let the ferret enjoy his triumph, for he did not see how either Lucy or young Ware could ever interfere with his happiness.

Lucy Lynx soon found life in the new cavern almost unbearable on account of the uncertainty that seemed to enshroud the movements of her friends.

She still held possession of the secret connected with the Silver King's tragic death; but the time must come when it would be known, for Cool Claude and Major Hollyhock had sworn that the mystery should be cleared up and the dark made plain.

She knew nothing of the arrest of the two friends—knew not that they were in the grip of the Banded Brood, but as the hours went by and she heard nothing further of them, she wondered what was taking place in the camp.

Her new home was one of the mines which Colonel Samson had abandoned for lack of metal, and she was all alone in its depths.

The fair young girl stood near the little table which had belonged to Samson's overseer when the mine was productive, and all was quiet around her.

The lamp she had brought to the place burned on the board, and threw her shadow on the wall.

Lucy had not paid much attention to the place. To her it was like other underground mine chambers which had been abandoned, and there was no record of those who had occupied it.

But all at once the girl picked up the lamp, and moving toward one of the walls, leaned forward and held the light before her face.

"What is this writing?" she exclaimed, her eyes riveted upon some letters on the dull wall. "Who has been here? I don't know when this mine was given up, but here is some writing which was placed on the wall since then."

She was oblivious to everything but the writing she had discovered, and with eyes that seemed to start from her head, she read as follows:

"In the S. E. corner will be found a box in which is the story of a life. The key to the secret is under the dust of the corner. This may never meet the eye of a living being; so much the better, perhaps; but the box is there."

Lucy Lynx read the writing on the stone twice before she lifted her eyes.

Which corner was the proper one? She did not know which way the chamber stood, but she carried the light back to the table and resolved to search.

After all it might be but the foolish vagaries of some one who was wont to inhabit the cavern during the flush days of the mine, and she would have but her trouble for her pains.

The first corner she searched rewarded her with nothing but a scratched hand.

Lucy turned away and sought another.

All at once her hand touched something beneath the dust which she scraped away, and the next moment, the lamp on the floor at her side revealed a box, which she dragged forth and stared at with all her eyes.

It was a little box made of hard wood, which had withstood the action of the earth very well, but when she carried it to the table, some black bits fell off half decayed.

Lucy Lynx's heart was beating as it had not beat for months.

She tried to open the box, but found that it would not yield to her eager fingers; then she picked up a stone which lay at her feet and tried it.

The lid broke at the second blow, and Lucy saw the box fall open before her.

She gave vent to a cry of delight, but at the same time she drew back with pallid face.

Some time elapsed before she recovered sufficiently to proceed, then she dived her hand into the heart of the box and fished up some musty papers.

Nor was this all. There came along with the papers a little packet in buckskin which had a certain weight, and Lucy caught it up and held it toward the lamp.

She let the papers go while she untied the packet and shook out its contents on the table.

Several articles of woman's jewelry fell out, and then a picture, which she snatched up and looked at.

It was the picture of a beautiful woman of perhaps thirty. There was about it a freshness which seemed to draw the young girl toward it, and for some time she gazed upon the face, forgetting entirely the other things which she had taken from the strangely discovered box.

"Who was she?" asked Lucy. "I wonder whose face I am looking into?" And then she started. "Can it be that this is she—that I have found in this prison the face of my mother?"

She dropped the portrait and turned to the jewelry. She picked up first a ring and then a bracelet, but they told her nothing. The mystery was as deep as ever.

All of a sudden, however, she found herself looking at the musty papers before her, and when she picked them up her hands trembled as if she believed herself to be upon the fringe of some great discovery.

Lucy Lynx summoned all her courage of soul to her relief, and in a moment was reading the strangest history she had ever met.

It was the story of a life—a life so replete with dark adventures that several times she almost dropped the manuscript and felt like throwing it to the floor.

But she read on. The lamp burned on the table, and she grew more and more interested. The narrative had a singular fascination for her, and though now and then she felt a flush of indignation suffuse her countenance, she did not desist.

The ending of the manuscript was sudden. It terminated as if one of the pages was missing, and Lucy looked into the box to see if it wasn't there.

The name of the writer of the story was gone. It was no doubt at the foot of the page she did not possess, and the longer she looked for it, the intenser grew her desire to find it.

"Was this design?" cried the girl. "Did the

writer intend that this story should remain a puzzle—that the finder should never guess his identity? Colonel Samson knew something about this life. The night I went to his house and had that terrible conversation with him, he dropped hints which tell me after these days that he knew the writer of this confession. Where is this man? What has become of the person who, in this hidden manuscript, calls himself Julius Rathbone, though I believe he would have signed another name to it? And these jewels and this picture?"

Lucy went back to the trinkets and looked at them again.

"It is all mystery, but this face exists. I believe it. I have seen it in my dreams and that since I came to Brimstone. This is the face that has haunted me time and again. The eyes are the very same. The mouth is the counterpart of the one I have seen in the silent watches of the night. And this terrible story of crime done and partly atoned for? Whose hand wrote out this confession? Who deposited this box in the corner of this cell to be found by me?"

Lucy went over the manuscript again. She read it word for word, letting nothing escape her and when she had reached the end for the second time, she was as much in the dark as ever.

It was an impenetrable mystery.

Lucy Lynx threw down the manuscript and caught up the picture again.

"Something tells me that this is the portrait of my mother," she cried. "I can't believe otherwise. Why has Lady Tiger watched me so long, and when she came to my house the last time with eyes of a tigress, why did she say that I had my mother's beauty even to the pretty droop in the eyes which I see here in this picture?"

She trembled like an aspen leaf while she spoke and was about to kiss the portrait in memory of her mother when a sound fell upon her ears.

In a moment Lucy had turned toward the door in the wall with the picture clutched in her hand and the following instant a key turned in the lock and a man stood before her!

But once before had she seen a face like this. "That is the so-called jailer of the Tribunal," said she under her breath. "I once saw him on the streets of Brimstone, and Cyclone Kit laughingly referred to him as the keeper of the Court keys."

For a moment the man who had opened the door stood surprised at the sight he beheld, and when Lucy moved he came forward, a singular gleam leaping up in his eyes.

"So you are here?" he said, looking first at her and then at the picture to which she still clung.

Lucy was silent.

"Is he hiding you from the Black Tribunal?" queried Jan the Jailer. "Did he think no one knew of this place under the ground? This is the Crippled Cyclone—the first mine that gave out for Colonel Samson. I used to work it for him and there's no part of it I don't know like a book."

All the time Jan was slipping forward with noiseless strides, and when he stopped he stood at the table grinning at the perplexed and half frightened girl.

"I won't betray you," he went on. "I hate her too well for that just now. But what have you found, my bird! A picture?"

He reached out as if to take the portrait, but Lucy drew back and shook her head.

"I won't keep it," he went on. "I used to see something like it and it may be the same one you see."

"Look at it, then," and she thrust the picture into his hand. "Take it and, if you can, tell me whose face it is."

Jan leaned toward the light and gazed a long time at the bauble in his dark hand.

"She's dead," he said, looking up at Lucy.

"Ah! But who is she?"

"She's got your eyes—I'll be hanged if she hasn't!"

"Don't torture me; I want the truth; you know it. In the name of all that is holy, reveal to me the true identity of the face in your hand."

Jan smiled and looked again at the picture.

"Where did you find it?"

"It was in this box and I found it in yon corner."

"Where he hid it, no doubt."

"Yes, yes; but who was she?"

"She was Julius Rathbone's wife and he was at the time he was killed Colonel Samson, the Silver King of Brimstone Bar."

"Heavens!" fell from the white lips of the young girl, and clasping her hands, she bowed her head upon the table and groaned.

Jan, the Jailer, looked down at her and smiled; but he did not attempt to lift her up.

CHAPTER XXX.

TEN FOR ONE.

JAN, the Jailer, went back through the long corridors of the Crippled Cyclone and stood once more in the shadows of Brimstone Bar. He wanted to see the woman who held the

destinies of the mountain camp in her hand. He was anxious to see once more the person known as the Queen of Sheba, the creature whom he had whipped at the command of the Masked Nine of Leopard City years and years before.

Jan had now no hopes of making Lady Tiger his wife. He knew that she would turn the whole machinery of the Black Tribunal upon him; that she would include him in the list of public outlaws and that if he expected to "get even" with her, he must do it soon.

He knew also that somewhere in the mine-court Major Hollyhock and Cool Claude waited for doom. He had had them relegated to the Round Chamber by an assumption of power which only intensified Lady Tiger's hatred of him; but he was not sure that that chamber held them at that hour.

From what we have heard him say to Lucy Lynx, Jan, too, was a secret-keeper. He knew something about the Silver King's earlier life; he could say to Lucy, hiding from the hand of Lady Tiger, that the picture she had discovered in the cavern was that of Samson's wife. Perhaps he knew more than this, but beyond this statement he had refused to go.

He had come down into Brimstone Bar and was watching the lights of the dens as if he would like to cross their thresholds and throw his dust into the scales of chance.

For some time he stood there leaning against a rock whose shadow screened him from observation.

"I wonder if she has formally posted Captain Satin-Slipper and his Celestial?" he exclaimed. "The post is right yonder, and no one seems to be in sight. I'll go and look."

Jan crossed the street and walked toward a tall post that stood on the fringe of the Plaza half in shadow. This was the outlaw post of Brimstone Bar, and here the decrees of the Black Tribunal were posted when it was desired that they should be known.

There were two pieces of paper fluttering from the post when Jan came up. They were partly in the moonlight, but it would take a keen eye to see the writing upon them.

Jan drew near the post, and strained his eyes to make out the words on the fluttering documents.

"They've outlawed Captain Satin-Slipper and Company," he grinned. "And by heavens! whose name is this on the other one? Mine, by thunder!"

Yes, his own name appeared before him, and he knew that he had been outlawed by the Court he had served so well, and all because he had made love to its mistress.

Jan, the Jailer, stood a little longer and studied the papers on the post.

All at once he put up his hand and caught hold of the one that bore his name.

In another instant he had torn it down and had it under his feet.

"She wouldn't like this sort of treatment; but she has to learn to take things as they come," said he. "I am her outlaw and she carries my autograph between her pretty shoulders. I wonder if the old scars don't burn whenever she thinks of the matinee that day in old Leopard City?"

"I will never forget it!"

Jan the Jailer turned as quickly as if a rattler had hissed in his path.

Standing a few feet away, with her figure drawn to the true height of a queen, was the woman to whom he had just referred.

Lady Tiger had come upon him with the stealth of the species whose name she bore, and he had not caught the sound of her soft tread on the baked ground of the Plaza.

"I will never forget that day," she repeated while he stared at her. "You escaped from me in the mine-court because the captain and his Chinese snake were creeping through the dark; but now I have you at the mercy of my revolver."

He knew what that meant.

If there was mercy in her tones it had no outward existence. Her voice was as cold and dark as the hiss of doom.

The next moment Lady Tiger came forward. "Move on—toward the Gilded Seraph!" she said in a voice of command.

Jan looked toward the open door of the den designated and saw beyond it the figures of the gamblers of Brimstone Bar.

"Forward, I say," said she again.

Jan did not speak, but moved on, and in a minute was approaching the trap with a thousand thoughts battling for the mastery in his brain.

"I can beat this woman," said he at last. "I know something she would not have revealed for the world. She dare not shoot me in presence of the men of Brimstone. I can stop her mad hand, and I will, or they shall know—"

He was interrupted by the voice of the woman walking at his heels.

"You should not have come back, after what has taken place," she said. "Some men are very foolish and forget that the hand of woman is all-powerful in some places."

He made no answer, but looked over his shoulder and caught sight of the leveled revolver and tramped on.

When the two entered the lighted room of the Gilded Seraph the inmates of the place looked up and started. They did not expect such a tableau.

"She has found Jan, the posted," went from lip to lip.

With stern face and welded lips, Lady Tiger marched her prisoner down the aisle and halted him at the bar.

"Give this man a drink; he'll need it presently," she said, with a nod toward Jan, and bottle and glass were set before him.

The hand of the jailer of the mine-court reached forth and took the treat. Drinking it down, he turned to the woman watching him with the eye of a lynx and said:

"I am ready now. What is on the bills?"

There was a certain coolness about Jan which some thought was assumed, but he had passed through desperate situations before and knew when to play a cool hand and how to play it.

Meantime Lady Tiger had swept her eye over the crowd and singled out two men who sat together looking at her with smiles on their lips.

"Come forward, Nick and Nock," she said.

The pair arose and came down the aisle, their burly figures as prominent as two giants' would have been.

"Strip that man to the waist!"

She had turned and was covering Jan with her finger.

Nick and Nock came on till they stood before the ex-jailer of the Black Tribunal.

Jan fell against the counter and clinched his brown hands.

"If he resists I will kill him where he stands," said the Queen of Sheba.

"If I am touched, I will reveal the past life of the woman who faces me!"

Lady Tiger seemed to lose a bit of color.

"To the waist, I said," she exclaimed, turning once more to the two men. "I will take the risks."

The following moment they sprung at Jan, and before he could resist he was thrown against the edge of the counter and his coat was on the floor at his feet.

While the work of stripping was going on, he could look over the shoulders of the men and into the eyes of the cool woman who was smiling over her triumph.

"Close his mouth!"

A heavy handkerchief was produced and twisted about Jan's face and then tied behind.

It was the work of a second.

In less than three minutes Jan was standing before the crowd, his brown skin bared almost to the waist and his broad shoulders gleaming in the light of the lamps of the Gilded Seraph.

His hands had been lashed to his sides, and he was at the mercy of the woman he had once whipped.

Lady Tiger had watched the work of her men with a smile of coldness. There was no doubt that she had longed for this very hour, and now he stood before her, his flesh at her mercy, and her hand eager to return evil for evil.

"Stand back! This man belongs to me!" she cried, drawing from beneath the folds of her garment a whip, the sight of which brought a flash into Jan's eyes.

The crowd had fallen back, and Lady Tiger stood in the half-circle, one side of which was the counter.

All at once she threw the whip into the air, and cracked it till little reports like those of a toy pistol were heard.

This even was torture to the stalwart man who had been stripped for the ordeal.

"Ten for one, Jan!" she said. "I have sworn that you shall have ten blows for one. You understand me. We need not explain to these gentlemen. Are you ready?"

He looked at her, and if his eyes could have spoken she would have had answer enough.

"Turn round!"

Knowing that he was doomed, and that in such a crowd as that he was helpless, the ex-jailer obeyed.

The whip was lifted in midair, and the next moment descended upon the man's shoulder.

There was a quivering of dark flesh and then a spurt of blood.

Another blow came after the first, and then another and another, each adding to the flow of blood and the number of cuts on the desperado's skin.

After the first stroke, Jan the Jailer never flinched.

The little man behind the bar—the only one who looked into his eyes—saw the lips come together and the orbs emit sparks of fire.

Lady Tiger plied the whip until she flung the bloody lash upon the floor and stepped back.

"Let him go!" she said.

The crowd made room for Jan to pass in, and he turned with a smile upon his face.

"Untie his hands and take the gag from his mouth."

Lady Tiger was obeyed, but the man she had whipped did not speak.

With the step of a lion he marched down the aisle, with his coat over one hand, and the other shut till the black veins stood out like cords.

The Queen of Sheba, unable to account for his silence, looked at him until he reached the door.

He had threatened to betray her. Why didn't he do it?

All at once the woman turned her head and caught sight of the open window at one side of the den.

The next instant her gaze became riveted upon it, for a face was there.

She noticed the lavender skin, the almond eyes, and the devilish mien of the startling apparition.

"Look! There's more work for my whip!" she exclaimed, pointing at the window. "There is No Tung, the Celestial. Quick! bring in the Satan in yellow."

Men sprung away to carry out her orders, but the face vanished, and when the toughs of Brimstone reached the open air, not only had Captain Satin-Slipper's mute pard disappeared, but Jan, the Jailer, was not to be seen.

Lady Tiger waited in vain for the yellow back.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BID FOR DEATH.

AMONG the shadows of night a man stood, not far from the scene of the whipping, and coolly put on a coat. His teeth were shut hard, and in his eyes shone a look of mad defiance.

"It is a long lane that turns not," he said, in audible tones. "It is a poor arrow that cannot be shot twice. You have shed my blood, and call that getting even. Well, maybe it is, but I will have something to say before this game has been played through."

The speaker was Jan, the Jailer, and he walked off with the last word on his tongue, and in another moment had disappeared.

"I will try it again, for a cool-headed ally is a good thing to have under certain circumstances. They must be somewhere in the mine-court, and I ought to know every chamber in the old place."

Five minutes after he reappeared under ground, and was flitting through the darkness of the mine, in search of the last captives of the Black Tribunal.

The whipped man, his back smarting under the merciless blows delivered by the mad hand of the Queen of Sheba, glided from dungeon to dungeon, but found no prisoners.

If Major Hollyhock and his pard, Cool Claude, had been taken in turn from the Round Chamber, what had become of them? Had they been dealt with by the Black Court, and were they finally out of the game, their hand but half played, and the secret of their motive locked in the hearts of the dead?

With Jan looking for the two friends, let us go ahead and see what has become of them.

We left them on their way to the Round Chamber, to which they had been escorted by command of Jan when he appeared to the Court after his encounter with Lady Tiger. They were taken to the dark place where the victims of the Tribunal were given breathing spells, and there left alone.

Escape seemed impossible, and they were able to feel the stone wall of their prison, but were not strong enough to force open the door set in the stone.

Hours passed and they were still in the cell which they could pace in the gloom, now together as they laid plans for the future, and now apart, as if they wished to be left alone each to his thoughts.

They could not tell when day came, for the dungeon remained at all times as dark as ever, but Cool Claude, standing near one of the walls, called out to Major Hollyhock that he heard a cricket.

The Man from Homespun hastened to where his companion stood, and both listened at the stone.

The chirping came from overhead, and they concluded that somewhere above there was an opening; but how could they reach it?

At last Cool Claude stood on his friend's shoulders and put up his hands.

He could touch nothing but the bare, rough stone, and in a little while he desisted and dropped to the ground.

The cricket chirped on, and all at once something fell to the ground at their feet.

Cool Claude stooped and picked it up.

"It was this," he said, handing to Major Hollyhock in the dark a bit of stone like a chip.

"That wasn't broken off by a cricket. The cricket up there is human."

Major Hollyhock said nothing for a moment. The Man from Cinnabar leaned against the wall and listened once more.

Another particle of stone or dust struck him in the face.

Somebody was moving along the ledge above the cavern.

All at once there came down from the unseen a sound which went through the man at the wall like an arrow.

"Melican men down there?"

"We are here!" answered Cool Claude.

Silence followed, after which a rope came grating down the wall, and the bands of the two men found it at the same moment.

"This means rescue," cried Major Hollyhock. "But who is up yonder?"

"A Chinaman, from the voice," was the response. "That is not the cricket we first heard, but it will do."

The rope was found to have loops in it, and when the friends tried it and found it solid enough for a ladder, they began to ascend one at a time.

The Man from Cinnabar was the first to reach the top of the wall and when he had pulled himself over the edge of it and stood in the dark there, he waited for the major to come up.

Still they had seen nothing of their rescuer and for some time they waited for him to make his appearance.

"This is the strangest part of the whole proceeding," said Claude Coldlock. "We have been helped out of the pit by some one, but he keeps in the background and we will have to get out of the mine as best we can."

"It may not have been a Chinaman."

"The voice gave the speaker away. It was the voice of a Celestial."

"But not No Tung?"

"Perhaps not, but a Chinaman all the same."

Leaving the rope dangling where it had befriended them, the major and Claude started off and were soon threading their way out of the mine-court.

They knew that hours had passed since their incarceration and hunger gnawed their vitals like a wolf.

"Stop! We are approaching some one," suddenly said a voice at Major Hollyhock's ear.

Both men had stopped in the corridor and stood like statues in the gloom.

"Have we encountered our cricket?"

All at once a light flashed up ahead of them and they saw the outlines of a human figure.

"It is a Chinaman!" said Major Hollyhock.

"But he is not alone."

They could see the form of a Chinaman along the gray rock of the wall and near it another figure which stood erect with the mien of a victor.

"Captain Satin-Slipper!" cried Hollyhock, after a moment's pause.

"But wait. That is not all."

There now came into the light of the match torch a third figure which stopped near the others, and then leaned toward them.

The two friends saw the third one make a gesture of violence as he shook his clinched hand toward a certain part of the underground court.

"How many did she give you?" asked Captain Satin-Slipper.

"Ten for one," was the reply. "I guess I got full measure, though I didn't count 'em."

"Did it hurt?"

"Jerusalem! you don't think you can cut one's back into strips without hurting, do you?" was the quick reply. "I felt every blow down to the soles of my feet. It was a flexible razor and she was the coolest barber I ever had at my skin."

They saw the other grin and the man who spoke passed one hand over his shoulder as if something still pained him there.

"We are three," he went on, "but we may wield a hand that will play havoc with the tigress and her cubs. We know the secrets of the mine-court as well as something about her past. I threatened to divulge what I know, but that didn't stop the whip one second. She ordered them to gag me and went on with the lashing. The others are somewhere in this mine. They haven't been killed, though they are marked for death."

At this the Chinaman caught the man's sleeve and pointed toward Cool Claude and his friend who were listening in the narrow passage.

"What, do you know where they are, No Tung?" asked the man, who was Jan the Jailer. "Do you say you know where we can find the guests of the Black Bowie?"

"We have just rescued them—that is, we let a rope down to them and they certainly know enough to get out of the trap."

"Where are they?"

"Back yonder somewhere; but do you think they would enter into a league with us?"

"In union there is strength," said Jan. "If each man fights his own battle Brimstone and its queen will conquer."

There was logic in this.

"To the trail of the men in the mine!" he went on. "We must lose no time. I feel the razor-whip on my back whenever I think of it. Oh, I've dressed my wounds; but I really want 'em to remain open so as to recall each accursed blow of the she-devil's whip."

The light moving along the wall showed Major Hollyhock and Cool Claude three figures that came forward and the Man from Cinnabar touched his friend's hand.

"Shall we unite our fortunes with theirs?" he asked.

"I don't know. This man in kids and his Celestial are mad and may do something rash. Then, there is the man with Lady Tiger's autograph on his back. He won't be as cool-headed as we would like."

"Let them pass," said Cool Claude, drawing the major into a dark niche alongside the wall

from which they beheld the three hunters pass and vanish in the darkness.

The light disappeared, but the sounds of the hunt continued for some little time, when all became as dark and still as of old, and the hunted men resumed their journey.

"Lady Tiger may not have taken formal possession of the Palace," said Cool Claude. "If she has not we would be safe there till we could play the big hand."

"It is worth trying. Come."

The route to Colonel Samson's house was cast in shadow, for the two pards found that night was over all when they emerged from the mine-court, and not long afterward they stood beneath the roof of the nabob's house and all was still and dark where the crime had been committed.

They could look from the upper windows upon the streets of Brimstone Bar and see here and there single forms that flitted over the ground, nearly all going toward some gaming-den of the mountain capital.

The night passed and morning came.

The warm sunlight streaming over the scene showed them the usual crowd of early smokers on the porch of the Black Bowie. They saw the red-shirted landlord come out and stand in the cool of the morning, and joke with his patrons as though nothing had occurred within the last six months to deprive him of two distinguished and profitable boarders.

All at once the hand of the mountain Boniface pointed across the Plaza and the occupants of the Palace looking in that direction saw a sight that astonished them.

Three men were already on the Square. They were marching abreast and such a sight they made!

"My God! they are the three outlaws of Brimstone!" cried Major Hollyhock.

Cool Claude said nothing. He was looking upon the sight, for he had seen that the three were Captain Satin-Slipper, Jan, the Jailer, and No Tung, the Celestial.

They were marching with heads erect and fire in their eyes—desperate men on a desperate mission.

"That is the coolest play I ever heard of," said the detective at last.

"It is a bid for certain death," was the reply.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PLAY OF THE BANDED THREE.

WHAT had passed between these three men in the heart of the mine-court no one knew but themselves.

That they had reached a most desperate conclusion was apparent from their appearance on the Plaza, for they had Brimstone Bar against them, and they were posted outlaws—posted and condemned by the Black Tribunal—Lady Tiger's Council of Doom.

They continued to advance till they reached a spot near the post from which still fluttered the decree of outlawry which condemned Captain Satin-Slipper and No Tung to the death meshes of the Black Court.

The men on the porch of the Black Bowie stared at them in utter amazement, for in all their experience they had seen no coolness that equaled theirs.

Captain Satin-Slipper wore kids which showed wear, but they fitted his hands to a nicety, and his womanish feet were incased in boots that bore on their outward surface the dust of the mine.

No Tung had a defiant look in his almond eyes, and carried his yellow hands along his sides, as if they were the most innocent and harmless hands in the world.

As for Jan, the Jailer, the lover and whipper of the beautiful Tigress of Brimstone Bar, he walked as erect as his companions, now and then casting a look at his comrades as if to see if they were going to recoil from the danger?

"How will the ball open?" said Major Hollyhock who forgot everything in his admiration for the courage of the banded three. "What will the minions of the Queen of Sheba do with them?"

"Wait. The match is at the powder; the explosion can't be very long delayed."

The next moment they saw Captain Satin-Slipper step in advance of his companions and face the men on the porch.

His voice came across the Plaza to the Palace with the distinctness of a bugle's note.

"We are here to stay!" said he. "We are the Banded Three of the Sangre de Christo Hills. We have pledged each other to resist with the last drop of blood in our veins the power of the woman who has the heart of a tigress and the hand of a cool killer of men in the dark. We have been outlawed and whipped. We are posted on yon post and the decree of our exilement flutters in the breath of morning. Where is the Queen of Sheba? What has become of the woman who throws a dagger under a bush and hurls into the hand of vengeance a young girl who was innocent of the crime as the babe unborn?"

This challenge was heard all over the Square.

The men on the porch started back and looked into each others' faces.

Such coolness Brimstone Bar had never before seen.

"Where are the members of the Black Tribunal?" continued Captain Satin-Slipper. "Let one of them step forth and take our message to the mistress of the Black Court."

There was no reply.

"Tell her that there are two more backs for her whip!" cried Jan, the Jailer.

No Tung waved his hand toward the hotel and folded his arms.

Suddenly the men of Brimstone looked toward another part of the Plaza and the three turning in that direction, saw what they had discovered.

The figure of a woman was advancing toward the tableau.

Lady Tiger, with her lips welded and her hands at her side, and in one of them a cocked revolver, half-hidden by the folds of her dark garment, was coming down upon the outlawed.

There was a smile at the corner of her finely chiseled lips, a gleam of eagerness under the lashes that overarched her deep eyes.

"There she is!" said Jan, and all three turned upon her and waited.

The Queen of Sheba walked to within a few feet of the trio and stopped.

"So you have come back and saved my men some trouble?" she said.

"We are back!"

"For trial?"

"For a settlement forever of the feud of the Bar."

A swift look toward the hotel and Lady Tiger covered the three with her hand.

"You are outlawed—all of you," she exclaimed. "You are not entitled to a trial by the jury of the Tribunal. You, Captain Satin-Slipper; you No Tung, and you Jan, with my autograph fresh on your back—all of you, I say, shall have the full mercy of the Court of the hills."

The two pards at the window of the Silver King's Palace saw the lips of the three curl proudly.

"If we are to feel the wonderful mercy of your Court, what is to be meted out to you, woman of more than one name and crime?" roared Captain Satin-Slipper, in a moment losing the look of the dude and becoming a lion among cool men.

The Queen of Sheba seemed to wince.

"Shall I read your history as I know it?" he went on. "We have a good audience and the boys will listen to it with a will, though they may still cling to you."

There was no reply.

Meantime there had come from every part of the mountain camp men of bronze who looked at the scene on the square and wondered what had brought it about.

Lady Tiger felt at her ease. She was surrounded by those whom she controlled by the power of her beauty and nerve and could look with a triumphant smile at the men standing shoulder to shoulder in the last desperate play for life and power.

Suddenly she threw up her hand and said:

"This is not the Tribunal of the camp. This is not the place for a shaft of lies."

"But we speak here all the same," and Captain Satin-Slipper threw himself forward and stood out from his friends.

"Go on, then."

Did Lady Tiger think what was trembling on that man's tongue? Was she aware of what he had in store for her?

Captain Satin-Slipper seemed taken aback by her coolness. He had never seen anything like it.

"Give it to her red-hot," said the voice of Jan, the Jailer in an audible whisper.

The face of the man in kids grew white under the eye of the woman he faced.

"Men of Brimstone, behold the wearer of fifty marks inflicted in a camp by the public whipper," he began. "Behold the woman who walked out of Red Vulture at the muzzles of the revolvers of the Vigilantes. Look into the eyes of the creature who wears on her arm the sign of the League of the Twisted Cords—a league which no one can mention without a shudder of horror and a blush of shame. She has been everything in her life—outlaw, bandit, robber, murderer!"

Without a sign of outward rage did the Queen of Sheba listen to all this. Nothing disturbed the calm beauty of feature; nothing showed that the charges were made against her.

She was a wonder of wonders and thought perhaps that, come what might, she could rely upon the men at her back.

And was she not right?

Captain Satin-Slipper looked at her and caught the gleam with which she had regarded him through the whole proceedings.

"The coolness of a female Mephistopheles!" he said, under his breath. "We have lost the play!"

Jan the Jailer glared at the Queen of Sheba with his hands shut hard and his teeth together.

"I add my testimony to that of Captain Satin-Slipper," he cried. "That woman has robbed

and killed without mercy. She deserted husband and child, and became a human hawk of the desert. She carries on her person now the scars of the avenging lash. She—"

The lifted hand of Lady Tiger broke the outlaw's sentence.

"Silence!" she said. "You will hear me ere that wretch speaks another word. I may be all he calls me; I have been a desperate woman for years, but he knows whose whip drove the iron into my soul and made me Lady Tiger, hiding from the past and becoming the creature I am to-day. They are outlaws—all three of those men. I appeal to the Black Tribunal. There need be no secrecy now; let the members of the Court of Brimstone Bar show themselves and say for whom they are. Captain Satin-Slipper, whose hands, white and soft as they are, are not stainless, is playing for the power he has abused. His yellow pard, the mute Chinese snake—the sneaking shadow of the hills—is still at his heels, ready to enjoy his master's triumph. And back of them stands the traitor turnkey of the mine-court—the man whose hand made me the creature I am, for, bleeding from his whip, I went forth from Leopard City, divested of the last attribute of womanhood."

"That settles the play against us," whispered Jan the Jailer. "We have lost, captain, and now comes the tug-of-war."

The lips of Captain Satin-Slipper twitched nervously, and his hand moved toward his hip.

But at this moment there was another scene which was the surprise of the play.

The agile figure of No Tung moved forward. It bounded toward Lady Tiger and, half-crouching on the ground in front of her, covered her with a yellow finger.

"No Tung's time has come to talkee," he said, his voice sounding strangely, for the men of Brimstone had never heard it before. "Him see Lady Tiger when she watchee not. No Tung follow her down the trails, and his eyes no lettee her gettee away. He was at her heels the nightee Samson died in the big house. No Tung was in the house, too. Him see Lady Tiger come in with the knife. He see what happen to Colonel Samson. The white girl did not kill him. The hand of Lady Tiger catchee him throat and bend him over a chair. Then the dagger go up and come down only one time. The Melican nabob falls back dead. She did it so quick that he did not cry out, but died right in her hand, and she laughed when she throw the dagger under the tree. Queen Sheba killee nabob in the Palace; Melican girl no kill him at all."

No Tung stood and looked at Lady Tiger for some time after making his charge, which was the last play against her as the mistress of the Black Court.

The beautiful creature said nothing, but turned upon the silent men who had heard it all.

"Choose between Lady Tiger and the three outlaws of Brimstone Bar," she said at last. "You have heard the testimony of the Banded Three. You have listened to the charges which they have hurled against me. I answer not. I am in the hands of the men whom I have nursed when sickness was upon them. I am willing to stand before the Court of the Bar even upon the testimony of three branded villains."

That was enough.

Cool Claude caught Major Hollyhock's arm and whispered:

"The tigress has won. The last hand of the three pards is worthless."

There was no answer, but Major Hollyhock's face lost color, but only for a moment.

"That proves it. Look!"

A tall figure had stepped from the crowd in the Square. He had the voice of a lion.

"There must be better proof against Lady Tiger than the word of outlaws!" he exclaimed.

"And we must furnish that proof," cried Major Hollyhock. "I have sworn to break the grip of that woman and to avenge the death of my brother!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ONE MINUTE TOO LATE.

In the teeth of their failure to turn the tables on Lady Tiger in the midst of her own, the Banded Three looked about them as if for an avenue of escape.

The queen of the camp had everything her own way and it was evident that the toughs of Brimstone preferred to live under the rule of a woman who might have a dark past rather than condemn her on the word of men like No Tung and Jan the Jailer.

As for Captain Satin-Slipper, he was a little above these two and had been a noted character in the camp, but as he had allied himself with them and was accused of having killed the High Sheriff of the Black Tribunal, he was an outlaw and had been condemned to death.

Yes, the play of the three had failed and nothing was left for them but to fight when the crowd moved and to fight to the end.

Captain Satin-Slipper realized this while he looked at the crowd waiting for the signal

which seemed to tremble on the lips of the Queen of Sheba.

But all at once with a withering glance at the trio, the beautiful woman turned and walked off.

She was followed by the eyes of all, and when she had reached the edge of the Plaza Captain Satin-Slipper looked at his companion.

What had happened? Were they to have a breathing spell, and would they have to meet than Banded Brood somewhere else under different circumstances?

The toughs of Brimstone who had followed Lady Tiger with their inquiring eyes, turned and looked at Captain Satin-Slipper and his pards.

They had not moved since the last word spoken to them by the woman of the camp.

"Come," said the captain. "We will go back—back to my shanty and await them there."

"Is it to be a duel to the death?" asked Jan.

"It is to be something, unless you want to run off."

No Tung laid his hand on the captain's arm, and the almond eyes seemed to scintillate with delight.

"You read it to her about right," said Captain Satin-Slipper. "Hereafter you need not keep a still tongue in your head. They all know now that you can talk."

"They will hear more from No Tung," was the answer. "She will hear something she will not want to listen to. Ha, ha!"

The yellowish face of the Celestial seemed to get dark, and his hands twitched.

"What are you going to do?" asked the captain, looking at him.

"No Tung stayee."

"With me, of course?"

A nod.

The three were not molested, and when the door of the captain's house had closed upon them, the Man in Kids dropped into a chair and took from his pocket a ring, which he threw upon the table.

In an instant the hand of No Tung had pounced upon it, and was holding it toward the light.

"It is the one she wore when they drove her from Red Vulture," he said.

"The same one," was the reply.

"It is the ring she wore when I whipped her for the Masked Nine of Leopard City," put in Jan.

"It identifies her. It tells the story of her wanderings."

At this moment No Tung, fishing in the depths of his half-civilized garb, drew up another ring not at all like the one on the table, and held it up in the light.

"Where did you get that one?" asked Captain Satin-Slipper.

"Where it was lost the night Colonel Samson died."

"In the Palace?"

"Yes."

"You saw the crime committed, didn't you, No Tung?"

The yellow face drooped.

"What took you to the Palace that night?"

The Chinaman turned away, and Captain Satin-Slipper and Jan the Jailer exchanged looks.

"You don't want to give up all your secrets at once, I see," pursued the Man in Kids. "You were at the house that night, and knew all the time that Lucy Lynx wasn't guilty of that crime. You never opened your mouth nor betrayed her innocence by a sign."

There was no reply.

"You ought to be hanged for that piece of business," continued the captain.

In an instant the eyes of the Mongolian got a queer light and were fixed upon Jan.

"That man let the girl go to her death by the hands of the Black Court. He knew she was innocent and could have saved her, but not a sign would he make, and the result is that she—the real heir to Colonel Samson's millions—is somewhere under ground, dead!"

The look on No Tung's face became a grin.

He leaned toward Captain Satin-Slipper and touched his arm.

"No Tung tellee the truth," he said. "The time has come for that, captain. The girl didn't die by the rope."

Captain Satin-Slipper recoiled with a startled look and his eyes seemed ready to start from his head.

"Lucy alive?" he cried.

"Ask Jan," said No Tung, pointing toward the jailer.

"What do you say?" and the captain wheeled upon the other one and was eager for a word.

"It is true. We might as well confess the truth now."

For a moment the Man in Kids sat like a person stunned by something startling.

Lucy Lynx not dead after all!

"Where is she?"

Jan pointed toward the Crippled Cyclon

"Underground, eh?"

"She was when I saw her last."

"Who rescued her from the Black Tribunal?"

"The Man from Cinnabar."

"Cool Claude! What became of the other one—the prospector, Willis Ware?"

"He has escaped also."

Captain Satin-Slipper did not speak.

"No Tung's silence did not kill the girl after all," put in the Chinaman.

"But it wasn't your fault that it did not," was the sharp retort. "In God's name, why did you hold your tongue when you knew that she was innocent?"

The Celestial, who was seated at the table, arose and stood before the two whites, his eyes fairly gleaming and his little hands with their long nails shining in the rays of the lamp.

"No Tung hated the white girl," he said, with all the animosity of a calloused heart.

"What, you hate Lucy Lynx?" cried Captain Satin-Slipper, looking madly at him.

The Celestial nodded.

"I thought you once told me that you liked the girl because Lady Tiger did not."

No Tung showed his teeth.

"Her father once struck No Tung."

"Hear him, Jan," laughed the Dude Desperado. "Lucy Lynx is a waif. No one knows anything about her history, yet No Tung says her father struck him."

Jan, the Jailer, turned to the Chinaman, who was looking toward the window, a dark cloud over his face and his lips twitching again.

"He may know," he said, in a whisper, leaning toward Captain Satin-Slipper.

"Do you think so?"

"He has been everywhere. You forget that he has not always been with you."

"That is true. If I thought he really knew anything about Lucy's parentage I would worm it out of him before we quit this house. I have longed to know something about this girl. I have longed to look into her life history and to unravel the mystery that surrounds her past. Look at him now. The yellow tough is mad."

No Tung had gone to the window and was looking out upon the Plaza.

Captain Satin-Slipper and Jan the Jailer were watching him out of the corners of their eyes and not one movement of his escaped them.

They saw the Chinaman draw from beneath his frock a knife which he tried by running his thumb along its edge.

Then he turned to the window again and seemed to watch something on the Square.

"Don't! Nothing is out there," said Captain Satin-Slipper, as Jan made a motion to slip to the window. "The Celestial is going to finish the game for one of us."

All at once the lithe figure of the Celestial turned in the light and standing in the middle of the little room, he threw the knife above his head.

"No Tung will die with the secret he carries in his breast," he said. "He knows who Samson was and who killed him. He knows, too, all about the past of the white girl called Lucy. No Tung has held his tongue and played silent for years for a purpose. He has failed to keep his oath. He will never get to carry it out and the coils of the Tribunal are about him. He will never go across the mountains to lay his bones in the vaults of his forefathers in the Flowery Kingdom. He has served Captain Satin-Slipper. He tore him from the post in the chamber of the mine-court, and once before he saved him from the noose of the Colorado toughs. He will save him no more. No Tung has failed and his oath must go without fulfillment. The knife is ready for the heart of No Tung, but it is his own knife. White brothers, good-by!"

Captain Satin-Slipper sprung up and threw out his right hand to arrest the downward stroke of the gleaming blade. Jan the Jailer did the same, but both hands missed their mark.

Down came the dagger driven toward his own heart by the hand of No Tung; the steel disappeared and for a moment the form of the Celestial remained erect as if he were dagger proof.

"The steel vest he wears has broken the force of the blow," thought Captain Satin-Slipper.

The next moment, however, the body of the Chinaman reeled across the room and fell heavily into a corner.

A gasp and all was over; and the hand still held the hilt of the dagger and when Captain Satin-Slipper bent over the yellow face it seemed to smile.

"What was his secret?" asked Jan. "What did he know about Lucy Lynx?"

"He is past the telling," was the reply.

At that moment a footstep fell just beyond the door and Captain Satin-Slipper, his hand on the revolver at his hip, went forward and opened it.

There stood in the light a tall figure into whose eyes he looked for a moment.

"Well, what is it?"

"We want the Chinaman."

"He is yonder."

The man at the door leaned into the shanty and looked at No Tung.

"Is he dead?" he cried.

"Yes. He has just killed himself."

"Why, that man killed Samson the Silver King. We have proof."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

COOL TO THE END.

A STRANGE stillness has settled over Brimstone Bar after the day of events.

The tables are at work again and the bronzed hands of the gamblers are as busy as ever.

Pacing a room which is fitted up with some splendor for the place, is the woman whose word for years has been law among the toughs of the hard camp.

She is alone.

The light that pervades the room falls upon Lady Tiger and shows her figure to the few who pass the house and are bold enough to look in.

She seems to have aged some, but her eye is as clear as ever and her white hands clasped behind her have grown into hands of marble.

Lady Tiger sees nothing, hears no sound. She is communing with her thoughts, and now and then looks up at the clock that ticks on the wall, her only companion, and mentally notes the time.

Lying across the table near by is a whip with dark stains all the way along from stock to lash.

The stains are the blood of Jan the Jailer and she drew it in the den of the Gilded Seraph.

For nearly an hour she paces the little room with the pace of a restless tiger. She turns abruptly and comes back, covering the same ground only to go over it again and again.

But the walk ends at last.

The Queen of Sheba catches up the whip, and for a moment feasts her eyes on the stains there.

"It is his blood, but what good did it do me?" she suddenly asks herself. "I drew it because I wanted to pay him back for the whipping at Leopard City; but that was poor revenge. He never groaned, and it did not seem to reach his heart. Now they tell me that the yellow man is dead—that he took his own life in presence of the man he had served so well. The man I sent for him reached him a second too late. I wanted to stand face to face with No Tung once more. Now that I know he knew how to talk all along, I wanted to ask him several questions; but the dead cannot speak, and I am balked."

She throws the bloody whip into one corner and turns to the door.

If she expected to see it open she was disappointed, for it remained shut, and she crossed the room to it. The next moment she was looking out into the street; nothing could be stiller than the camp at that hour.

"They tell me that the two pards have turned up, and, in defiance of me, are back at their old quarters at the Black Bowie. This man who calls himself Major Hollyhock and the one who is Cool Claude, and not Jack Juniper, are playing a cool hand for something. Is it for vengeance?"

Lady Tiger started back, with the question on her lips, for a man had stepped in front of the house, and she stood in the doorway, looking at him with a white face.

"You?" she asked, bending forward and continuing to eye the new-comer. "Come in."

The man obeyed, and when the light of Lady Tiger's lamp fell upon him, he stood revealed as the person from Homespun.

Lady Tiger led the way to the table, and waved her caller to a chair.

Major Hollyhock, looking at her, took the proffered seat and remained silent.

"I am prepared for anything," she said. "You did not send me word that you were coming, but I almost expected you. I have learned that you and your ferret had returned."

"My ferret, eh? You seem to suspect something."

She did not reply for a full minute. One of her hands crossed the table half-way, and her eyes were fastened upon him.

"The Chinaman is dead," she said at last.

"Yes. He killed himself."

"The master lives—the little man who sports kids still defies me."

"Captain Satin-Slipper? Why don't you strike him down?"

"Why should I? There was a time when he was as powerful as I, but now he is powerless. Every dog has his day, and this one has enjoyed his."

"Did you ever find the ring which is to prove your right to the estate left behind by Mark Mayfield?"

She started back, looking at him with a queer face.

"Did Cool Claude tell you about it, or was it all a plot between you two?" she cried. "I had the ring once. I swear I had, but it was stolen and I haven't recovered it."

"Didn't you expect to find it on the person of No Tung, the Celestial?"

"Perhaps."

Major Hollyhock took from his pocket a little packet, the opening of which she watched with great curiosity.

When he had unwrapped the coverings he laid upon the table a picture which she glared at till her eyes looked like living coals.

"Tis she!" she suddenly cried, pouncing upon it and snatching it up before he could remove it out of her reach.

"I thought you would know it. Lady Tiger,

don't you know that this very act of yours proves your identity beyond cavil?"

She uttered a strange cry.

"What, have you brought a witness with you?"

"No. I came alone. You don't seem to know me."

She dropped the picture and fell back.

For some time she looked into his face making a study of it in many ways; but at last, perplexed still, she seemed to give it up.

"It is too deep for me," she said.

"Go back in your life," he said.

"How far?"

"Say ten years."

She seemed to think deeply for a little while, and then, still eying him, said in a low voice:

"You must give me a clue. My head is all in a swim to-night."

Major Hollyhock smiled and took up the picture on the table.

"This is not your picture," said he. "There is some resemblance between it and your face, but not as it looks just now. When you were in the height of your glory—before you wore the stripes of the Masked Nine—the woman's husband's money caught you."

"Are you going back to that?"

"For a moment only. You saw the first wife laid away in the little graveyard on the Mountains of the Dead, and then you played your hand for the living. You played it so well that you became his wife; but in time you deserted him."

"No more!" cried Lady Tiger. "I confess to all you say. I was the wife of the man whose name you need not mention. When I found him here with millions at his command he knew me, but did not speak. We lived within a stone's throw of one another, seeing each other nearly every day, but making no sign. It was startling strange, wasn't it? Samson, my former husband, was the Silver King of Brimstone Bar. He lived alone, turning into gold everything he touched."

"Watched like a lynx by you and the man who was then in your coils. Captain Satin-Slipper was a good helper, but he seems to have broken the meshes, and to-night is under guard, but by no means dead."

"Of course I watched Samson," said Lady Tiger. "He needed watching, for he was as sleek as a panther."

"You watched the girl, Lucy, too."

The woman seemed to fall back.

"Now, Lady Tiger, if we are really alone, and with no eavesdroppers around, let me ask you why you tried to throw that crime upon that fair girl?"

There was no answer.

Lady Tiger, looking at Major Hollyhock, did not move, but toyed with the handle of a little knife which lay under the lamp.

"You ought to know that without asking," she suddenly exclaimed, springing up and standing before him with the mien of a queen of tragedy.

"No Tung saw it all."

No answer.

"What did the girl herself see?"

Lady Tiger took a quick stride across the room. Her figure reached the furthest side, and there she threw back a curtain and revealed a niche which was lighted by a little lamp.

"You forget that I am still the Queen of Brimstone Bar," she said, looking back at Major Hollyhock. "I am all-powerful where I reign, and fifty men stand ready to do my bidding. That lamp has burned ever since I crossed the boundaries of this camp. It is to burn while I inhabit it. You have played avenger with the man for whom you sent the day after Samson's death at the Palace. I don't know who you are, but there must be a vow of some kind in your heart."

A smile overspread Major Hollyhock's face.

"The Chinaman was in the house the night the Silver King died," she went on. "He had crept thither for a purpose which, as I stand in the presence of Heaven, he accomplished. He killed Colonel Samson!"

The man in the chair found himself rising to his feet. The declaration had fallen from Lady Tiger's lips like a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky.

"You can't deceive me," he cried. "You can't throw upon the dead the odium of murder. Though you are still mistress here, I will carry out my oath—"

"An oath? I thought so!" she laughed.

"I have tracked you over miles and miles of territory. I have never given you up for a moment, and when I discovered you here with him near you, I remained. You don't know me? You never heard of Samson's brother, did you?"

Lady Tiger seemed to grow into stone in the speaker's sight.

"If you are that person, then, you have sealed your doom by coming to the death-trap of Brimstone Bar. You shan't enrich Lucy Lynx by strangling the Queen of Sheba."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FOOL AND HIS LETTER.

CAPTAIN SATIN SLIPPER and his sole remaining pard were watched by the men of Brim-

stone Bar and they waited for the signal that would turn them over to the mercies of the Black Tribunal.

The corpse of No Tung, the Celestial, still occupied the corner of the captain's house and now and then the two men would glance at it and wonder what the secret was which the dead man had refused to reveal.

At last there came toward the house the steady tramp of men. They marched with measured tread and Jan, the Jailer, standing at the window caught sight of the line as it moved across the Plaza.

"They are coming," he said, looking over his shoulder at his companion. "Shall we fight?"

Captain Satin-Slipper looked up.

"Is she with them?"

"I don't see her."

The next moment the Man in Kids stood up and shut his white teeth hard.

"It is two against fifty," he went on. "What do you say, Jan?"

The ex-jailer did not speak.

"I leave it to you. I am not particular," and Captain Satin-Slipper played with one of his gloves, looking now and then at his last pard, a man whose courage he had seen tried but once.

Jan the Jailer turned slowly from the window and with a last look at the line on the Plaza said with a half smile:

"A man might as well throw his life away first as last. We will be turned over to the Tribunal and I have been its jailer."

He took from his belt a revolver which he examined in the light and then turned once more to the door.

"They are here," he said as a rap fell upon the portal, and Captain Satin-Slipper stood up.

The glove was hurled to the floor and the soft hand of the man thus brought to bay wound itself around the butt of a silver-mounted six-shooter.

His eye was fastened on the door.

"Come in," he said.

The following moment the portal opened and the faces of half a dozen men were seen at the threshold.

"We are here, two living and one dead," said the Dude Desperado.

The tall figures at the door did not stir.

"Don't you want us?"

"Yes."

"We are here, I say. We don't intend to die at the hands of the accursed Court of Brimstone Bar."

"What, don't you? Show them our front, boys."

The men outside moved so as to present themselves to the two beyond the portal, but they did not flinch.

All at once the revolvers of Captain Satin-Slipper and Jan the Jailer went up and covered the faces in the light.

"Fifty to two! We know the odds, but man had better die standing than dancing upon nothing at the command of a woman."

The ball would have opened then and there if a hand had not been thrown before the doomed pards of the Bar, and a voice cried out:

"It is eternal banishment!"

A sinister smile passed over the face of the dandy tough.

"Banishment, eh?" he said.

"It is not death. Banishment is the sentence of the Tribunal."

"We have not been tried according to the code."

"But you have been sentenced. The sentence is eternal banishment from Brimstone. This is Queen Tiger's mercy."

The thin lips of the captain curled. He looked on the eve of rejecting the unexpected leniency. His figure seemed to increase in stature.

"Why has she relented? That some day she can hunt me down and slay me in the midst of friends?"

"I don't know. I carry out the sentence, nothing more. Are you ready?"

"To pass into exile?"

"Yes."

"Does the same sentence apply to Jan?"

"It applies to both of you."

"And the dead man, yonder?"

"Oh, we are going to hang him for the murder of Samson, the Silver King."

Captain Satin-Slipper picked up his glove and stepped to the door.

"I am ready," said he, placing himself under guard. "I have nothing to take along. Where is she? But, don't let me see the woman; we shall meet again. Tell Lady Tiger that, though driven from Brimstone Bar by her sentence, we shall meet in the future—"

"But she says not," said the leader of the band. "I was to say to you, captain, that you were never to see her more. Take this. It tells all."

At the same time he handed to the Dude Desperado a bit of folded paper which bore the impression of one of Lady Tiger's rings in red wax.

Captain Satin-Slipper took it and placed it in his bosom, then, looking once more at Jan the

Jailer, to see whether he was at his heels, he walked away in the midst of the men of the Black Court.

Tramp, tramp went the body of toughs through the streets of Brimstone. They turned toward the mines, and passed the mouth of the one so well known to the reader, going on to the edge of the camp, where all touched their hats to Captain Satin-Slipper and pard, and left them there, exiles forever.

For some time the Man in Kids looked after the retreating figures, and not until the last one had disappeared did he think of his companion, or the letter in his bosom.

Taking out the latter, he struck a match and stepped to one side.

Jan watched him narrowly and wondered what made a pallor suddenly cross his handsome face.

In a little while captain Satin-Slipper came back, crushing the letter in his hand and seemingly unaware of Jan's presence.

"What a fool I was!" was all he said, and then, replacing the paper beneath his coat, he walked into the shadows of the rocks and left Jan to follow or remain; just as he elected.

The letter which the Dude Desperado had read in the light of his match was brief, but it told much.

It ran thus:—

"You go into exile with the love of the woman who sends you thither. We shall meet no more. I am guiltless of the blood of the Silver King; the Celestial killed him, but I was there. The secret kept so well by Lucy Lynx, you may know some day; but, as for me, I shall die loving to the last the only man who ever really won my heart—Captain Satin-Slipper, the Man of the Kids. Farewell forever!"

LADY TIGER."

This was the strange letter which the man of many adventures had crushed in his hand; this was the true story of the light sentence, the motive for his exilement.

No wonder he had called himself a fool. If he had not secretly loved Lucy Lynx—if he had not turned from the Queen of Sheba—he might have been a full-fledged Silver King and not an exile with a sentence of death hanging over his head.

He had missed it, and, grating his teeth, he rejoined Jan, the Jailer, and the two went into the forest at the foot of the mountain and the shadows closing around them seemed to shut them out of human sight forever.

While these events were transpiring in the mountains, Lady Tiger, having dismissed Major Hollyhock, stood in the night air looking at a man who was posting something on the post in the middle of the Square.

When he had finished he came to her and stopped, touching his hat with his bronzed hand.

"Call the Court together," said Lady Tiger.

The tough went away and the Queen of Sheba turned from the spot.

In a little while figures might have been seen moving toward the mouth of the mine-court and the court-room underground was lighted up as if for a trial.

The men in black masks arranged themselves around the wall and all stood like statues as they stood on many a former occasion.

Presently the door in the rear of the judge's bench opened slowly and a woman masked and clothed in black entered and mounted the dais. The men saluted her.

For a moment the gleaming eyes behind the velvet took in the whole scene in the room and then the figure in the arm-chair straightened.

"The prisoner of the Tribunal is here. Let the court proceed," she exclaimed.

The men of the Black Tribunal looked at one another and the eyes were filled with wonder.

There was no prisoner within the gray walls.

"I am the prisoner of the Tribunal!" Lady Tiger said. "I am the person on trial before the Tribunal of Brimstone Bar. I charge myself with the murder of Colonel Samson."

The words had a singular echo in that fatal room and not a sound followed them.

"You heard the charge of the Chinaman on the Plaza," she went on. "He accused me of driving the knife to the heart of the Silver King. I am ready for trial."

All at once one of the masks against the wall stepped forth and lifted his hand.

"What is the plea?" he asked.

"Not guilty!"

The stalwart turned to his companions.

"You have heard the plea of Lady Tiger. What shall our verdict be?"

In an instant fifty hands went up and one word spoken by all was the verdict of the Black Tribunal.

"Acquittal!"

Lady Tiger seemed to fall back at the sound and her hand was passed under the black mask that concealed her face as if to calm her thoughts.

She did not speak.

"Now for the two enemies at the Black Bowie!" cried half a dozen voices.

"I forbid!"

The hand of the Queen of Sheba was in mid-air and her face was turned toward the little

door through which the prisoners of the Tribunal were wont to pass after sentence.

"We are to have visitors," said she, looking down for a moment at the fifty. "We are to hear from the very men you have sentenced in your minds. They should be here now."

In a moment a man who stood near the door in the wall called out that some one seemed in the room beyond the wall.

"Open the Door of Sighs!" commanded Lady Tiger.

There was a hurried turning of faces toward this door and the next second it opened.

Nothing was seen for a little while and then out of the room beyond stepped a man from whom the lookers-on fell back, but in an instant all were staring, not at him nor at Cool Claude who was at his elbow, but at the young girl who had entered between the pair.

It was Lucy Lynx, and those who looked at her remembered when they saw her last—when, sentenced to death for the murder of Colonel Samson, she had passed that very door with the details of her doom ringing in her ears.

But she was there again, as beautiful as ever, and still to them the nameless waif of Brimstone Bar.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE END OF IT ALL.

THE girl looked round upon the assemblage, but most at the masked creature in the chair.

She must have recalled her last experience in that room of stone; how, despite her plea, she was sentenced by the lips of Captain Satin-Slipper, and how, when all was over, she was hurried from the place to be rescued at last by Cool Claude who had discovered her in the death-room of the Black Court.

For a little while the eyes of Lucy were riveted upon the figure of the Queen of Sheba, and all at once the hand of Lady Tiger went up and the mask was dashed to the floor.

"I will not hide my face from this girl," she said. "She saw it one night when we stood face to face for a moment under the roof of the Croscos of the Bar. Girl, unseal your lips now. Tell the truth at last. These men want to know the secret you have been keeping. Go on!"

She waved her hand at Lucy who stood near Major Hollyhock and waited for her to speak.

A tremor was seen to pass over the young girl's frame. She tried to take a step toward the dais, but fell back and gave up.

"Is it really your desire that I should tell all?" she cried, looking at Lady Tiger.

"The time for the truth has come!" was the reply.

Lucy seemed to collect her thoughts.

"You don't want the little of my history which is known to myself," she began. "I shall begin on the night when the man known as Colonel Samson was murdered at the Palace. I went there at his bidding—the first time I had ever crossed its steps. He awaited me in the little room where he was killed. Colonel Samson told me the story of his life's wanderings; he seemed to keep nothing back. He told me how he married young in life and how he lost his first love to wed again and even again.

"By one of his wives he had a daughter. She disappeared one night and from that time for years he heard nothing of her. He came to Brimstone Bar; he became the Silver King of this camp, making money hand-over-fist, turning into gold everything he touched. He showed me the will he had made, and, strange to say, it gave everything to me. I was made the sole heir to everything he possessed, and when I remonstrated, saying that I was but a nameless waif, he told me that I was his own child—the long-lost daughter.

"I could not believe this wild confession, but he proved it beyond the shadow of doubt. I was stunned. The will was read to me, and all was to be mine. Then he made another confession as startling as that which proclaimed me his child. He told me that the woman known as Lady Tiger was his wife."

The woman listening to this narrative from the chair of the Tribunal was seen to start and her face lost its last vestige of color.

"Go on!" her eyes said to Lucy. "Keep nothing back because I am here."

"You may imagine how startled I was by these confessions for, as was natural, I put this and that together and made out whose child I was. My blood seemed to flow like molten lava through my veins. My head seemed on fire. I staggered from Samson's side and went to the door for a bit of air. I seemed to choke. As I opened the door and looked down the steps I saw a dark figure crouched upon them; but, dark as the place was, I knew it."

Again the girl stopped and looked once more at Lady Tiger.

"Go on!" said the Queen of Sheba.

"The person crouched at the foot of the stair was Lady Tiger. I could not be mistaken."

"You were not, Lucy," said the woman in the chair.

"Horried at the sight, I went back to Samson, saying nothing. He repeated his confession, saying that I was his child and reaffirm-

ing the provisions of the will. Then I went away; that is, I left the room and went down the steps, but the figure I had seen there was gone. I reached the room at the foot of the flight when something human glided past me and ran up the steps. I saw it for a moment and a strange thought flashed through my mind. I saw something glitter in the hand of that person. Faint and almost unable to stand, I fell back and lay in a faint on the floor, for I cannot tell how long. When I came to all was dark and I crept up the steps and into Samson's room. I saw the Silver King, my confessed father, sitting in his chair; but when I looked into his face I discovered that he was dead.

"The next moment I was flying from the house. With an awful secret in my possession, I longed to get out of the accursed place. I had almost seen Samson killed. I resolved never to divulge my secret, for I was sure I knew who killed him—that the woman who brought me into the world had taken the life of my father. Guilty as I believed her to be, I resolved to shield her, and now you know why, in this room, when on trial for my life I refused to unseal my lips and tell what I knew about the killing of the Silver King of Brimstone Bar."

Lucy Lynx stood for a moment silent after her story. Not a sound was heard, but all eyes were turned to the cool woman on the dais of the Black Court.

"I was there that night. I entered the house of the Silver King with a crime in my heart; but before Heaven, I came away without having taken his life!"

Lady Tiger spoke with feeling.

"I crouched at the foot of the stairs. I saw the girl at the feet of Colonel Samson. I heard all that passed between them. The mines of the Silver King were to pass beyond my reach, for there was no possibility that he would ever acknowledge me as his wife. But the figure that ran up the steps when she came down was not mine. That fitting thing with a knife in its hand was No Tung, the Celestial. I waited for some time, knowing that he would make all things even between Samson and myself. I did not try to hold back the hand of the yellow cat of the camp.

"No Tung came down with triumph in his almond eyes," continued Lady Tiger. "I saw the light of murder there ere he passed from the Palace. But he had a dark piece of evidence against me for he had seen me enter the house; not only this, but he found one of my rings in the room where the dead lay, and I could not prove that I had not killed Samson. Then, our former relationship! We had been husband and wife. We had lived together as such, but here in Brimstone we met and passed without a nod. I am not that girl's mother—"

Lucy recoiled and stared at Lady Tiger.

"Not my mother?" she cried.

"No! The wife he had before me bore that relation to you. The picture you found in the box in the corner of the chamber—the box which contained the unsigned confession—was the portrait of your mother. He must have placed it there for the spot where it was found was one of his mines. You have shielded a woman who bears no relationship to you. When you thought you were shielding your mother from the vengeance of the men of Brimstone Bar, you were standing between the hard Court and the exile of Red Vulture and the whipped siren of Leopard City. I know more to-night than I ever knew before. I know that the man on your right is Colonel Samson's brother, sworn to hunt me down for a crime which was committed years ago. I know, too, that the other one is Cool Claude, a detective who has given my life his attention and who, while in Major Hollyhock's employ, is trying to find the wicked wife of Mark Mayfield and the murderess of Thunder Ranch."

Could a confession have been blacker than this one?

And it was spoken with a smile at white lips and with the coolness of a practiced Borgia.

"I would have given Colonel Samson the dagger that night, if he had shown no desires to alter the will he read to you, girl," said Lady Tiger, continuing. "But the Chinaman came between with the long knife with which he afterward took his own life, and when I found Samson he was already dead. Then I discovered the will, burnt it, and made one of my own. I robbed you at last, girl, ha, ha!"

Lady Tiger fell back from the circle before her, and looked for a moment over all.

Her hand moved to the spring that operated the little door in the rear of the dais, and as it opened, her figure vanished.

It was so sudden that those who saw could not believe she had disappeared.

But the empty chair and the black mask lying on the platform told them that the Queen of Sheba had played her last card and was gone forever.

"Not my mother? Thank God!" rung from Lucy's throat as she turned and fell into the arms of Major Hollyhock.

Another day came, and then another and still another.

The mystery of Lady Tiger's hiding-place was still unsolved.

The members of the Banded Brood were looking high and low for the woman once their queen, but without success.

Weeks passed and Lucy had taken possession of the wealth of Samson, the Silver King of the mountain camp, and could have become mistress of the dread Tribunal if she had wanted to.

Major Hollyhock, her avenging uncle, now passing under the name which rightfully belonged to him, was almost always at her side, and Willis Ware, the young prospector who had been in hiding after his rescue by Cool Claude, came out, and was about to make the former waif of Brimstone his bride.

One day two men found deep in the heart of an abandoned mine the half-decayed body of a woman.

A candle had burned to the socket at her side, and gone out. In one of the skeleton-like hands was held a bit of colored stone, and a match revealed some scribbling on the dull wall.

It told the fate of the beautiful branded Queen of the Sangre de Christo Hills, and they buried the remains where they would not be disturbed.

Lady Tiger had passed out of life with the scars of Jan's lash on her back, defeated in her last game for golden stakes, and robbed by Lucy Lynx of the love of the only man she had ever worshiped—Captain Satin-Slipper, the Dude Desperado of the Hills.

For there was no doubt that the waif of the Bar had won Captain Satin-Slipper's heart, and that Lady Tiger, discovering this, was eager to sacrifice the girl to the vengeance of the Black Tribunal.

Some time after the last events we have recorded, there came to Brimstone Bar a man who walked up to the counter of the Black Bowie and called for a drink of "Red Murillo."

While he drank the gamblers of the place looked at him as if his figure was somewhat familiar, and when they saw a kid glove fall from his hand as he paid his score, a cry of "Captain Satin-Slipper!" arose from the lips of all.

The man heard the cry and smiled.

Turning to the crowd, he came down the aisle and stopped at one of the tables.

"Whatever became of her?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"If you mean Lady Tiger, she is dead. If you refer to Lucy Lynx, she is the wife of Willis Ware."

The somewhat seedy-looking man gave a short gasp, then, straightening, threw a look around the room and strode away.

"Gentlemen, a man plays the fool about twice in his life," he said, at the door. "I might have had a share of the ten bonanzas. I might have been boss of Brimstone Bar!" and he passed out, the same gloved dandy he had always been.

And thus passed from sight forever the famous Captain Satin-Slipper, the Dude Desperado of the Gold Hills.

THE END.

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